

MORE THAN "SUKIYAKI" AND IDOLS:
JAPANESE POPULAR MUSIC 1945-1999

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Interdisciplinary Studies Program:
Asian Studies
and the Graduate School of the University Of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master Of Arts

August 2000

"More Than 'Sukiyaki' And Idols: Japanese Popular Music 1945-1999," a thesis prepared by Bryan D. Chaney in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program: Asian Studies. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

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An Abstract of the Thesis of
Bryan D. Chaney for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program:
 Asian Studies
 to be taken August 2000
Title: MORE THAN "SUKIYAKI" AND IDOLS: JAPANESE
 POPULAR MUSIC 1945-1999

Approved: _____
 Dr. Jeffrey Hanes

Japanese popular music provides an excellent example of the interplay between popular culture and society. However, it has not been studied much systematically in the West. This thesis covers the history of Western style rock and pop music in Japan after the Second World War, with especial interest paid to music of the late 1980s and 1990s. Also covered is the variety of social factors, such as education, technology, and wealth, that have affected the consumption, marketing and listening of popular music in Japan. International musical interactions and their implications serves a further focal point.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Professor Hanes and my test readers, Lee Toop and Eric O. Costello, for their invaluable help, input and support in the preparation of this manuscript. Professors Brown and Eric Cazdyn were also a great help in bring forth issues of relative importance. I also wish to thank the Asian Studies office for providing a grant for the purchase of CDs necessary for this project. Special thanks, in no particular order, goes to Ai Sasho for translation help, Aya "McIleran" Masuda for introducing me to Japanese pop in the first place, Jose Cabezas and the entire P5 mailing list for great conversation and directing me to some great resources, TUNAC for a welcome respite and insights into anime and popular music, and Tim Husom at Emperor Norton. An extra special thank you goes to Jeff Magoto and the Yamada Language Center for both understanding my need to split time between the center and writing and allowing me to give a presentation on Japanese popular music during the 1999 Foreign Language and International Study day. "Love and peace!"

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Music is more than an object of understanding: it is a way of perceiving the world. A tool for understanding.

- Jacques Attali¹

[W]riting about music is like dancing about architecture... - Elvis Costello²

The above two quotes neatly encapsulate the problem that anyone writing about popular music has to face. On the one hand, studying music and how it is marketed and consumed is an important means of looking into a contemporary society. Yet, in the process of translating the music into words, something is lost. What seems immediate when listening becomes abstract in the telling. The benefits, however, from thinking about and evaluating music, especially in a historical and social context, are invaluable. As Attali notes, music is a tool for understanding the way a society perceives the world- its values, the tastes of a broad range of classes. To achieve that understanding, it is necessary to think, analyze and write about music.

Far too often when writing about music, authors tend to overlook or downplay the importance of social context. Yet,

¹ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985) 4.

² Quoted in David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1995) 157.

as Attali has written, "[m]usic is prophecy. Its styles and economic organization are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code."³ Music can simulateneously act as the reflector of the hopes, dreams, and realities of the society and serve as a means of exploring and directing social change. Yet, the changes in a society can also affect when and how quickly music develops and transforms. It is the constant tension between the timing of the influx of musical influences and societal changes that shapes the unique musical history of each country and society. Furthermore, the impact of music can be felt on either the micro or macro level. While music can certainly prefigure broad sweeps of societal change, listening to music remains an intensely personal experience. The impact that music has on a person's life can be as significant as the type of music a person listens to.

Because music can serve as both as a reflection of and a means of directing society, there has been increased study by academics in the West of popular music. Music can be seen as a medium for the culture industry in the industrial age. Music can be seen as a method of the cultural imperialism of the West over disempowered peoples around the globe. Music can be seen as a means of expression for those very same disempowered people to speak out against the tyranny of the West. It can be seen as both a signal and cause of social change. It can help shape and define the identity of various social groups based on age, race, gender or class, sometimes

³ Attali 11.

without regards to geographical location. It can help bridge gaps between social groups. Popular music can be all of these, often contradictory, things at once, and different authors have tried to document all the nuances of its identity.

Yet, what is it meant by "popular" music? In its broadest sense, it could mean any music that is listened to by a large segment of the population and is commercially successful.⁴ This covers a wide range of often hard-to-define genres: classical or art music, folk music, jazz, rock, country, etc. Yet, even though a particular genre or performer is not successful in a strictly commercial sense, the music can still have a tremendous impact. For example, the work of the Velvet Underground proved influential for many subsequent artists, despite poor commercial sales of their albums.

Popular music could also be defined by musical elements and characteristics. Yet, despite the formation of an international popular music style within the last 40 years, popular music definitions are often based on Western musical conventions. Western folk, popular and classical styles share elements in common with each other that are not necessarily present or given the same weight in non-Western musics. Furthermore, the difference between what is considered popular and other musical styles is often not as

⁴ Deanna Campbell Robinson, Elizabeth B. Buck, Marlene Cuthbert and The International Communication and Youth Consortium, *Music At The Margins: Popular Music and Global Cultural Diversity* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991) 10.

clearly demarcated in other cultures.⁵ *Enka*, a type of music that was the dominant form of popular music in Japan from the 1930s to 1960s, originally referred to political protest songs of the 1870s and 1880s. Musically, it combined Irish and Scottish folk melodies in a pentatonic (5 note) scale, Western instrumentation and notation with Japanese notions of vocalization, rhythm and instrumentation.⁶

What sets popular music apart is its social element. The relationship that various people form with a style of music is just as important as what form the music takes, for the relationship that is forged carries a great deal of the meaning in the music. Popular music is the music of daily life, regardless of the style.⁷ While this is still a vague definition, the social element can not be stressed enough. The changes in how people construct social meaning and how some people form subcultures around certain styles is an reoccurring theme in the study of popular music.

Japanese popular music, especially in the last 50 years, is a reflection of social and cultural change within Japan. While on the surface this may seem almost obvious, in many ways, the study of popular music can provide the best barometer of the "hybridization" of Japanese culture. Since the Meiji Era, and especially since World War II, Japanese culture has been subject to numerous outside, most notably Western, influences. Japan exists in a historical moment

⁵ Robinson, et al. 11-12.

⁶ Alan M. Tansman, "Mournful Tears and Sake" *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture* ed. John Whittier Treat (Honolulu: U Of Hawai'i P, 1996) 111-12.

⁷ Robinson, et al., 12.

where no culture can be thought of as being pure and has become "encumbered, or entangled and overlapping with what used to be regarded as extraneous elements..."⁸ Rather than dismissing Japanese interpretations of Western style rock and popular music as simply imitative, a thorough study of the Japanese negotiations of the music forms can serve as a means of seeing the societal changes in the postwar period. In turn, by correlating societal changes, such as the role of education, affluence and international exchange, with popular music, it can be demonstrated that the two seemingly separate realms affect and feed off of each other.

The primary interest of this thesis is to look at the Japanese popular music scene in the 1990s. However, to talk about the now in a meaningful manner, it is necessary to discuss how Japanese popular music evolved to this point. In addition, the social, economic, and technological changes that have occurred since the end of the Second World War have had a profound impact on shaping the music. How and when people listen to music is as significant as the music they in turn produce and consume. The production and consumption of music has also been shaped by other social factors such as the changes in gender relations and the increased importance of youth as consumers. All of these factors overlap and play off of each other to produce the distinctive development of Japanese popular music.

One trouble with writing about popular culture in general is the impression that discussions about a particular artist or artists somehow privileges their place, suggesting

⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993) 317.

they are more worthy of study. Then they become like the *auteurs* of the French New Wave, those directors that were worthy of study and emulation, and ignoring all others. At the same time, however, it is impossible to discuss every artists during a given time period. The goal is to select those artists that, during the time period in question, that are representative of the larger trends in popular music. This is not meant to be a complete history, but a narrative of events that will inform the conclusions.

As Mark Schilling⁹ has noted, few Westerners today could name a single Japanese rock singer, comedian or cartoonist, though the number of those who can has rapidly increased in the past 10 years. Anime (Japanese animation), for example, has become so popular that it is commonly found on TV (Pokémon, for example), in the movie theaters and has become a major stylistic influence. The popularity of karaoke and the Tamagotchi fad are further signals that there is a greater affinity growing between American and Japanese popular culture. While no Japanese artist since has yet reproduced even the minor chart success Pink Lady had in 1979, there are indications that Japanese popular music will continue to have a growing and loyal fan base in the West as it already has throughout Asia. This is not to say that Western recognition of various aspects of Japanese popular culture is necessary, but it does raise the stakes in terms of the urgency of why Japanese popular culture needs to be examined.

⁹ Mark Schilling, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture* (New York: Weatherhill 1997), 9.

Other reasons to study Japanese popular music are numerous. For example, the size of the Japanese music market is enormous. By the late 1960s, the Japanese market became the second largest in the world, behind that of the United States¹⁰ with sales of recorded music worth 565.5 billion yen (\$5.655 billion) in 1995.¹¹ The music market parallels a similar role the Japanese economy has played in the world economy at large.

Articles about Japanese popular music in English, however, have become more frequent since only about 1990. Many authors who wrote about Japanese culture tended to look at classical culture, especially with respect to music and film. As Schilling notes,¹² even today writers for English-language media in Japan tend to equate mass appeal with being beyond their interest. Thus focus remains on Butoh dancers or taiko drummers; those elements, while marginal to contemporary Japanese life and of limited appeal, that still retain the notion of "Exotic Japan." This group of scholars and critics, many of whom came to Japan in the immediate postwar period, bemoan the rapid Westernization that has occurred and instead focus on what they perceive as being representative of pure Japanese culture, regardless of current relativity and popularity.¹³ The few articles

¹⁰ Komota Nobuo, Shimda Yoshifumi, Yazawa Tamotsu, Yokozawa Chiaki, *Nihon Ryūkōkashi— Sengohen* [History of Japanese Popular Music— Postwar] (Tokyo: Shisousha, 1980) 47.

¹¹ Schilling, 11.

¹² Schilling, 12.

¹³ Joseph J. Tobin "Introduction: Domesticating The West" *Re-Made In Japan Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society*, ed. Joseph J. Tobin (New Haven, CT: Yale UP 1992) 29.

written in English before about 1991 about Japanese popular music were mostly by Japanese scholars and critics. For many musicologists and ethnomusicologists outside of Japan, on the other hand, Japanese popular music remains largely unstudied because it is assumed to be just like Western popular music. But slowly through the 1980s and certainly by the early 1990s, that began to change. With an increasing interest in Japanese popular culture in general and greater involvement by Japanese firms in the American entertainment industry, namely Sony's purchase of Columbia and Matsushita's acquisition of Universal, which included MCA (and then later sold to Canada's Seagram's), trade papers such as *Billboard* began regularly to devote more space to the Japanese music scene.

Japanese popular music, however, has never been a monolithic entity. As different genres of popular music have been introduced and developed within Japan, various groups of people have adopted the music (and in some cases, the lifestyle associated with the music). As fans began to nativize and internalize the music, other styles and influences were introduced. Musical subcultures were key in the formation of numerous international musical styles. This thesis focuses on many of those international styles that started out as small groups of musicians and fans sharing similar interests in music and style; rockabilly, rock and roll, folk, electronic music, punk, etc. Some of these styles went on to be highly influential on a broader basis and others have remained small.

However, the pattern of how groups negotiate new musical

styles is remarkably similar across cultures. A model developed by Robinson, et al.¹⁴ in their book *Music At The Margins* proves to be highly useful. Their theory can be applied to the Japanese case both in the broad sweep of changes since the 1950s and in the manner individual groups of artists handled specific styles. Robinson, et al. break down the evolution of popular music into four separate and overlapping stages. Stage one is marked by the initial exposure and listening to a new style of music. Stage two is playing the new music and imitating it, often with localized versions of international pop songs. Stage three is indigenization of the musical form, adapting it to local conventions and tastes. The final stage is the mixing of national and international musical styles in an eclectic fashion. The final stage is also marked by increased face to face meetings between international and national artists and global distribution. As Robinson notes, not all countries are at the same stage and not all musical subgroups are at the same point in their evolution. It should also be emphasized that elements of all the stages are present at any given time, since the development of musical style is ultimately a very personal process. But, at any one historical moment, one particular stage or another tends to dominate. With respect to Japan, the first and second stages were often closely intertwined, though in a few cases, such as rap, they can be separated out.

The *Music At The Margins* model provides the basis for the organization of this thesis. Chapter Two will cover the

¹⁴ Robinson, et al. 259-60.

listening and imitating stage, from approximately 1945 to 1965. During the Occupation and its immediate aftermath, a number of musical styles ranging from swing and country to eventually rockabilly were introduced into Japan. This chapter will focus on both Japanese reactions to these musical styles and the role that affluence and education had on affecting the spread of these styles. Chapter Three will cover the indigenization of Western popular music styles, from 1965 to 1985. Here, Western music idioms are integrated fully into Japanese popular music and made "native." In the process, a number of institutions and styles peculiar to Japanese popular music such as idols, New Music, and tie-ups are developed during this time. Also significant during this time were changes in how popular music was viewed by fans and critics. The final chapter will cover diversification, from 1985 to present. This chapter will cover the rapid multiplication of popular music styles that Japanese artists worked in. There are several reasons for this, including improved access and affinity with a wide range of musical styles, and a situation where niche groups could flourish, through both performance and recording. The chapter will also cover the increasingly international nature that elements of Japanese popular music began to acquire starting in the late 1980s.

While this thesis will focus on the post-World War II period, Japanese encounters with Western music go back to the Meiji period. As part of the overall modernization push by the Meiji government, in 1872 a group of "school songs"

(*shôka*¹⁵) was introduced and then formally adopted by the Ministry Of Education in 1879. These songs, collected and edited by Izawa Shunji¹⁶, under the instruction of Boston music teacher Luther Whiting Mason, combined Western songs with Japanese lyrics, such as "Auld Lang Syne", and Japanese pieces harmonized in Western manner. Often these songs were to be accompanied by an organ, much in the manner of Protestant churches.¹⁷

From this basis, the contemporary form of Japanese popular music began to take shape. By the late 1920s, mass popular music had become a major force. The oldest of the record companies in Japan is Nippon Columbia, with its origins in 1907. It acquired the Columbia name in 1927 after investments by the American and British arms of Columbia Records. That same year, RCA Victor established Japan Victor (in the postwar era, this would become JVC) and the German label Polydor established Nippon Polydor by acquiring the import company that had previously handled its imports. Since electric recording was coming into prominence at about that time, the three companies were able to set up studios and plants utilizing the new technology.¹⁸ The term *ryûkôka* (meaning literally "popular music") was also developed by the

¹⁵ In this thesis, the ^ over a vowel indicates a long vowel in Japanese. The tonal quality of the vowel does not change, but is held for two beats.

¹⁶ Normally in Japanese, family name is first and given name is last. This thesis follows that convention as much as possible. However, some Japanese have become more well known outside of Japan by given name first. Examples of this include Ryûichi Sakamoto and Towa Tei.

¹⁷ Conrad Schirokauer, *A Brief History of Japanese Civilization* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, 1993) 230; Tansman 111-12.

¹⁸ Nakamura Tôyô, "Early pop song writers and their backgrounds," trans. John Dolan *Popular Music* 10 (1991): 266-67.

recording companies about this time to refer to Western sounding popular music.¹⁹ Musically, the style was influenced by Russian folk songs, French *chanson*, tango, and popular jazz and blues, as well as Japanese folk and street entertainment.

As in the prewar period, the music of the postwar period has been influenced from numerous directions. The chronicling of these influences on popular music will demonstrate not only changes in society, but also how closely popular music and society are intertwined. At the same time, I will show how that change is often mediated by the technological and social constraints applied from various quarters. Unlike "dancing about architecture," these discussions will give critical insights into Japanese popular music and society.

¹⁹ Tansman 113.

CHAPTER II

LISTENING AND IMITATING: 1945-1965

In the immediate post war period, the first musical style to attract attention in Japan was country. While country music had been available in Japan as early as 1934, it was not until after World War II that it became regularly and widely available in Japan. The Allied Armed Forces' Far East Network (FEN) played records by contemporary country stars, which was the first time most Japanese heard country music. Mitsui suggests that some of the more active early fans were college students, at that time mostly young men from wealthy families, the only ones to have the money and motivation to attend higher education after the devastation of the war.¹

Some of those who listened to country music, often the college students, would form and play in country bands. For example, Torio Atsutaka, son of Viscount Torio Koyata, was the bassist for an early Japanese country band, the Chuck Wagon Boys. Other groups were made up of converted tango bands. They could do this mainly because they already had the instruments, or could purchase them, and were trained and educated to appreciate Western music conventions. The

¹ Mitsui Toru, "The Reception of the Music of American Southern Whites in Japan," *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* ed. Neil V. Rosenberg (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P 1993) 277-78.

educated to appreciate Western music conventions. The college students also had the advantage of being able to spend time listening to and practicing music in their spare time. Some of these early country bands got enough attention to record on Japanese labels as early as 1948. For example, the country standard "Tennessee Waltz" was sung in English by a Japanese artist and became a hit during the early 1950s.²

The attraction of the music, however, especially that of the college students, is a little bit harder to guess at. It could have been the exoticism of the music and the imagined freedom that American ideals, here associated with country music, possessed. After the difficulties and increasingly constrained feeling of the war years, these ideals would seem very attractive.³

During the American Occupation, the more upbeat American music along with a few similarly styled Japanese records became popular. In addition to country music, FEN also introduced Japanese audiences to numerous other styles, most notably contemporary jazz. While FEN could be heard primarily in the Tokyo area, the impact of this exposure would slowly spread throughout the country.⁴

The primary people buying records during the late 1940s and 1950s were wealthier families. Records by foreign artists made up the bulk of the Japanese releases between 1948 and 1966. These families, which were also the same ones that tended to go to college, had the means to be exposed to a wide range of Western music styles, such as country, jazz,

² Tansman 113.

³ Mitusi 278-79.

⁴ Steve McClure, *Nippon Pop* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1998) 9.

wide range of Western music styles, such as country, jazz, rock and folk, both through records and through education. Once attracted to a particular style of music, they could afford to further augment their collection by buying imported records. In the late 1950s, an imported LP cost 2500 yen, which was about a fifth of the average college student's monthly income—too expensive for all but the wealthy.⁵ This is not to say that only the wealthy were fans of country and other Western styles in the 1940s and 1950s. Radio had become widespread by the late 1940s and most anyone in Tokyo could listen to FEN.

Far East Network introduced Japan to a new sound, rockabilly (called *rokabiri* in Japan), around 1956. Some artists in country and western bands started to play covers of Carl Perkin's "Blue Suede Shoes" and Doug Kershaw's "Louisiana Man." Clubs like the Tennessee in Ginza, featuring rockabilly bands, soon became popular.⁶ One of the first artists to adopt the rockabilly sound was Himo Masaki, who started out leading a country and western band called All Stars Wagon. He arranged folk and children's songs to a rock beat and in 1958, recorded the first made-in-Japan rock song "*Hoshi wa Nandemo Shitoru* [The Stars Know All]."⁷

The early rockabilly singers grew from this early fan base of country and country-swing band enthusiasts. Many of them had been attracted to music at an early age and had given up their college studies to focus more of their time on

⁵ Kawabata Shigeru, "The Japanese Record Industry" *Popular Music* 10 (1991): 335; Mitsui 280-81.

⁶ Schilling 197.

⁷ Schilling 197-98.

given up their college studies to focus more of their time on performing. One example of this is Mickey Curtis, a singer of mixed British and Japanese parentage who fronted the rockabilly group Crazy West. In contrast to America, however, Japanese fans and singers still regarded rockabilly as a subset of country music, rather than a separate music style. Live shows by rockabilly singers became more common and Japanese popular music began to reflect these influences.⁸

In 1958, the first major showcase for rockabilly by Japanese artists was put on, a week long festival called "Western Carnival" starting on February 8th at Tokyo's Nichigeki Theater. There, 45,000 fans gathered to listen to early rock stars Himo Masaki, Yamashita Kenjiro and Mickey Curtis and Crazy West. Few of the fans realized that the artists were primarily doing covers of Elvis, Carl Perkins and Gene Vincent songs. The third Western Carnival, put on in September 1959, got an extra boost by the appearance of Paul Anka, to perform his hit "Diana." Sakamoto Kyû, of "Sukiyaki" fame, also appeared on the same bill and soon became one of the top five rockabilly artists. Sakamoto got his start in a country and western band called Sons of Drifters in the mid 1950s.⁹

Live performances such as the Western Carnival played an important role in increasing the popularity not only of rockabilly, but other styles like country and swing, and domesticating these styles into the local musical idiom. However, it was imported records that remained the location

⁸ Mitsui 280.

⁹ Schilling 197, 216; McClure 9.

However, it was imported records that remained the location of the "authentic" sounds. For those "in the know," the Japanese performers of rockabilly were just imitations of the "real" rockabilly performed by American artists. The notion that "authentic" rock and other styles of popular music were not being produced in Japan would be reoccurring motif throughout Japanese popular music history. In some respects, this is similar to the situation in England during this period. The mainstream audience in Japan focused on one type of music, *kayôkyoku*, and in England it was big band-style jazz. Yet for an increasing number of urban youth, imported records and, to a lesser extent, movies served as the primary focal point.¹⁰ The mainstream media, radio and the newly introduced television, focused on *kayôkyoku*, which older and rural populations favored. However, the relatively affluent urban classes showed a more eclectic taste; not only rockabilly and country, but also all styles of jazz, Latin music and classical music— all mainly listened to on records.

But there were key differences between the situation in England and Japan. First was the simple availability of imported records. While by the late 1950s, more rock and roll and rockabilly titles had become available, they were still out of the reach of the average teenager. The main staple of rock and roll in the 1950s and 1960s in both the United States and England, the seven-inch single, while not uncommon in Japan, was primarily reserved for domestic singers.

¹⁰ Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP 1996) 39-43.

singers.

Secondly, most young people had neither the money nor the leisure to buy records and other elements of the youth culture in comparison with postwar America. Even compared with England in the 1950s, with a large percentage of its population in urban centers like London, Manchester and Liverpool, Japan was predominately rural. As late as 1955, 41 percent of the work force worked in agriculture. The number of agricultural workers had been swollen by returnees from the Korean peninsula and Manchuria and those that fled the cities during the war. Yet, after the Occupation ended and factories and businesses began rebuilding, massive numbers of people began to stream from rural areas back into the urban areas. By 1960, the percentage working in agriculture had dropped to 32.6 percent.¹¹

Change in the balance between urban and rural populations in the 1950s prompted other demographic changes that ultimately affected popular music. One was the increased emphasis on education in postwar Japan. While basic education was highly valued in prewar Japan, the war had destroyed many school buildings. It was not until early 1950 that compulsory education up to ninth grade became possible. Yet, only 36.7 percent of girls and 48 percent of boys had the opportunity to receive a high school education with an even smaller number, mostly boys, going on to college. The majority of children at this time worked in

¹¹ Gary D. Allinson, *Japan's Postwar History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 1997) 84-85, 110-11; Kazuko Tanaka, "Work, Education, and the Family," *Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present and Future*, eds. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Atsuko Kameda (New York: Feminist 1995) 296.

college. The majority of children at this time worked in family owned business and farms.¹²

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the *sararii-man*, or white collar salaried worker, became the common ideal for many young males. To become a *sararii-man* meant a secure financial life, escaping the monetary uncertainty of family run businesses and farms. The white collar worker also represented the movement into an elite social class. The best way to become a salaried worker was to first graduate from high school and then soon after, graduate from a university, preferably of high caliber. By 1960, 59.6% of males and 55.9% of females attended high school and by 1970, those figures increased to 81.6% and 82.7%, respectively.¹³ The number of universities in Japan also quickly increased, from 49 in 1942 to 245 in 1955. The number of students attending universities increased more than fourfold between 1950 and 1970, increasing from 13.1% of males and 2.4% of females entering a four year institution in 1950 to 27.3% of males and 6.5% of females in 1970.¹⁴

This push for education had some interesting side effects in terms of popular music. With the steadily increasing number of people coming to the cities, and working in both blue and white collar jobs for corporations, the amount of disposable income for families began to rise. A larger percentage of families, finding themselves in a stable

¹² Thomas P. Rohlen, *Japan's High Schools* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P 1983) 67; Tanaka 298-300.

¹³ Atsuko Kameda, "Sexism and Gender Stereotyping in Schools" trans. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Atsuko Watanabe *Japanese Women* 111.

¹⁴ Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow "College Women Today: Options and Dilemmas" *Japanese Women* 127; Allinson 111; Rohlen 67.

larger percentage of families, finding themselves in a stable financial situation, coupled with increasing industrial production by Japanese businesses, began to use the extra income to purchase other items, such as small appliances. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, in the first flush of the economic recovery, many people were striving to buy the three Ss, *senpuki*, *sentakuki*, and *suihanki* (fan, washing machine, and electric rice cooker).¹⁵ That the emphasis had shifted to consumer goods and education, rather than just basic survival goods, indicates the rapidity of the recovery.

Simultaneously, commercial mass communications, radio and the newly introduced television were developing in Japan. Businesses trying to further expand consumer demand used the media to advertise their goods. One of the means of making their goods stand out was the use of music. The relationship between commercials and popular music began the same year that commercial radio started, in 1951. Coincidentally, that was also the same year as the first LP was produced in Japan. In September of that year, camera manufacture Konishiroku (now Konika) debuted a song called "*Boku wa Amachuakameraman* [I Am an Amateur Cameraman]" in its commercials. Much like American radio jingles of the 1940s and 1950s, the song was specifically composed for the company, with the brand name repeated several times throughout the piece. Yet, most companies did not use this method of advertising at first. Even with television starting in Japan in 1953, the number of

¹⁵ William W. Kelly "Tractors, Televisions and Telephones: Reach Out and Touch Someone in Rural Japan" *Re-Made In Japan* 78-79; Komota et al., 36.

commercial songs a year did not exceed 20 until 1956.¹⁶

At the same time, to fill up airtime of the new medium, it was decided to bring over one the most popular show formats from radio to television, that of the music programs. The longest running and the one that really reflected changing times is *Kohaku Uta Gassen* or "Red and White Song Contest." Started in 1945 by NHK, the national broadcasting service, and initially broadcast on radio, the show has been broadcast every New Year's Eve since then. The premise of the show is simple. A wide spectrum of artists is invited and they are divided into two teams, red for women and white for men. The audience and a panel of judges then decide which side has won. At the end, all gather around to sing "Auld Lang Syne" in Japanese and the show ends 15 minutes before midnight. To be invited to the show became a great honor, with only the most popular artists of the year being selected.¹⁷

As televisions became more common in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the popularity of music shows like "*Kohaku Uta Gassen*" increased as well. Their importance in both promoting new songs and showcasing popular music also increased. It was also during this time period that the stylistic palette of the types of the songs performed on the music shows increased. In addition to *kayôkyoku* and *enka* songs, jazz, French chanson and even rock began to appear on the music shows. It was not unknown for a singer to do a cover of a Western pop hit like "Que Sera Sera" or "Be Bop A

¹⁶ Kimura Atsuko "Japanese Corporations And Popular Music" *Popular Music* 10 (1991): 318; Kawabata 335; Komota et al. 37-38.

¹⁷ Schilling 94; Komota, et al. 41.

the music shows. It was not unknown for a singer to do a cover of a Western pop hit like "Que Sera Sera" or "Be Bop A Lula" during this time, reflecting the importance of these songs in the pop charts.¹⁸

At the same time, the use of Western style music in commercials became much more common. From the 20 commercial songs in 1956, the number rapidly increased to 166 in 1959. The nature of the commercial songs also began to change. The songs began to move away from simply repeating the sponsors' name and slogan, to more general themes the advertiser wished to have associated with their product, taking cues from common themes in popular music. Between 1955-1958, these themes were love, home and relationships, and while the brand name was still present, it was deemphasized. In 1959 and 1960, what Komota, et al. call the "Shock Period," songs with topics bordering on the scandalous for the time, such as erotic love, became a favorite means of attracting attention to a product. However, the songs were still being specially written for the advertisers, and while the name of the product was still present, it was even more deemphasized. By 1961, the "image" song appeared, with the product no longer even mentioned in the song. Rather than write a song that describes directly the benefits of a particular product, a song was created that was meant to invoke the feeling that a product wanted to convey. For example, if a product was aimed at a young audience, a bright, cheerful tune might be used, while if a product wanted to invoke an air of

¹⁸ Schilling 95.

sophistication, a jazz flavored tune might be used.¹⁹

But just as televisions were becoming more common in Japanese households and rockabilly music was becoming more popular, rockabilly acts were banned from television. The increased popularity was prompted in part because many people wanted to witness the 1959 wedding of Crown Prince Akihito. Unfortunately, one of the first things many new television viewers saw was news reports of the near riotous crowds surrounding the Western Carnival. The Western Carnivals proved so popular that throngs of young people jostled and tried to cram themselves into the theater. This gave many people a negative impression of the nascent scene, in some ways not unlike the negative reactions to early television appearance by rock and roll performers in the United States. In response, NHK and the commercial television programs, banned the appearance of rockabilly acts on their shows for two years. Local officials would often refuse to give permits for rockabilly performers for fear of repeating the scenes of the Western Carnival. At the same time, the tastes of youth shifted to sounds similar to American pop of the time, the softer sounds of Paul Anka, Neil Sedaka, and Connie Francis, which were closer to *enka* and a little easier for parents to accept.²⁰

This does not mean that the rockabilly artists disappeared. For example, Sakamoto Kyû's first hit was a Japanese version of "Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka Dot Bikini" in 1960. In 1961, he joined a group called Paradise

¹⁹ Komota, et al. 38-39.

²⁰ Komota et al. 33, 36-37; Schilling 198.

Bikini" in 1960. In 1961, he joined a group called Paradise King and had a hit called "*Kanashii Rokujûsai* [Sad At Sixty]." ²¹

But also during this time period, broadcasters, with the help of government officials, began to pressure artists to change their image and the content of their music. During the Occupation, the record companies adopted the Record Production Criteria [*Rekôdo Seisaku Kishun*]. However, in response to songs that some felt pushed the boundaries of public decency, as represented by the "Shock Period" commercial songs, and during an era in which government officials were undermining some of the Occupation reforms they felt went too far, more stringent regulations were drafted. First drawn up in July 1959 and revised in September 1961, these eleven regulations, called the *Yôchûi Kayôkyoku Toriatsukai Naiki* [The Required Warning of the Handling of Popular Song Regulation], sought to limit what songs were broadcast on radio and television. ²²

The emphasis on television broadcasting was prompted by how quickly it spread in Japan. The pervasiveness of television would also become an important thread in the development of popular music after the 1950s. By 1959, television became a major means for the promotion of songs, through the proliferation of music programs. As Komota, et al. emphasize, from the beginning of television in Japan, music programs have had a prominent role. ²³ Since television

²¹ *Komota et al.* 36.

²² Komota, et al. 44-45.

music programs have had a prominent role.²³ Since television became widespread in short order, with the number of television stations often exceeding the number of FM radio stations in many areas, and quickly became the media of choice for many people, the major record companies quickly used television as the primary tool for promoting new songs and acts; without television exposure, new acts were doomed to failure. In turn, throughout the 1950s and 1960s and into the 1970s, what was played on the music shows reflected and often drove what was popular in the mainstream. By having the exposure in the media, artists and musical styles became more likely to be accepted by a wider range of people. During the 1950s and the 1960s especially, the relationship between what music was popular and what music was shown on television was particularly tight, since one reinforced the other. Since television, a media that often emphasizes the visual over the aural, became the primary means for promoting new popular songs, this led to the emphasis on the physical appearance of the performer, a fact that acts would start to run against starting in the late 1960s.

Unlike in the United States where many independent radio stations sprung up starting in the 1940s, and played for particular segments of the population, government broadcasting permits in Japan were difficult to obtain. State-operated NHK was the only broadcaster until 1951, when the first commercial stations began.²⁴ When commercial television started in 1953, many areas of Japan only had one

²³ Komota, et al. 36.

²⁴ Komota, et al. 33.

television started in 1953, many areas of Japan only had one commercial station in addition to NHK, and all drew their programs from the Tokyo-based stations, with a few programs produced locally. The situation of radio was even more restrictive. Until 1988, the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications, which regulates broadcast licenses, only allowed one commercial FM station in a prefecture, and all were affiliated, except for FM Yokohama, with Tokyo FM.²⁵ Thus these regulations were able to exert a huge amount of influence on what songs could be performed and become popular.

The following rules governed which songs could not be broadcast according to the *Yôchûi Kayôkyoku Toriatsukai Naiki*. The rules were based on a similar agreement adopted in September 1941; the position in that particular agreement is indicated in parentheses. The rules are roughly in order of importance as determined by the broadcasters and government officials.

1. In a love affair between a man and a woman, frankly suggesting a physical relationship. (5)
2. Frankly stating either male or female sexual characteristics. (7)
3. Expressing in a charming or affirmative manner dishonest enjoyment or adulterous relationships, etc. (6)
4. Obscene silliness or innuendo content or expressions (9)
5. Expressing in an affirmative or charming manner degenerate, nihilistic or pessimistic speech and conduct. (8)
6. Expressing in an affirmative or charming manner

²⁵ Kas Fukatsu "Fewer Outlets, Fewer Formats" *Billboard* 31 Aug 1996: 68.

6. Expressing in an affirmative or charming manner crimes as well as brutal acts or speech and conduct in opposition to public morals. (4)
7. Things that would reflect unfavorably on youth.
8. Things that could cause prejudice against those with mental or physical disabilities. (3)
9. Expressing disdain, slander towards any individual, group or occupation, or otherwise sully anyone's honor. (2)
10. Expressing the injury to the dignity of mankind, or any race, nationality or country or reflecting badly on friendly international relations. (1)
11. Any other items that conflict with broadcast criterion. (10)²⁶

As you can see, rule number 7 is new. It should be noted that regulations concerning the themes of erotic and illicit love, which are covered in the first four rules, were the first and foremost concern with the officials who drafted them.

However, these rules did not end the engagement of Japanese youth with Western, especially American, music. As noted above, Sakamoto Kyû's first hit was "Itsy Bitsy Yellow Polka Dotted Bikini." He also had a hit with "Good Timin'." Other songs covered by Japanese artists that became hits include Little Eva's "The Locomotion" (done by Itô Yukari), Frankie and the Belmonts' "Sherry" (done by Paradise King), and Shelley Fabares' "Johnny Angel" (done by The Peanuts).²⁷ The Peanuts, a girl duo, was one of the several groups that had numerous hits during the 1960s performing Japanese

²⁶ Komota, et al. 45. Translation by author.

²⁷ *Best Omoide no Hitto Pareedo: Vakeishon* [Best Memory Hit Parade: Vacation] Apollon (Japan), APCA-1052, 1994.

had numerous hits during the 1960s performing Japanese versions of Western pop songs. It was also during this time that TV shows specializing in showing this style of Western pop proliferated.²⁸

However, rock and roll and other Western styles of popular music, primarily jazz, and to a lesser extent country and western, had a broader influence on Japanese popular music. *Enka* and the other styles of *kayôkyoku* began to reflect more concretely the influence of Western music. For example, after 1960, prominent percussion, tonal harmonies and Western seven-note scales became more common. Sakamoto Kyû's "*Ue O Muite Arukô* [Keep Your Chin Up]" (a.k.a. "Sukiyaki") is representative of the changes that were occurring in Japanese pop.²⁹

"*Ue O Muite Arukô*," written by Nakamura Hachida and Ei Rokusuke, debuted on an NHK TV program in October 1961. The song was then released by Toshiba-EMI in December 1961. The song became an enormous hit in Japan in 1962 and began making the rounds in Europe in the spring of that year. Most countries translated the title into the local language, except in Holland, where it was called "Unforgettable Geisha," and England, where it shared the same title as in America, "Sukiyaki". The title "Sukiyaki" was given by Capitol, the American branch of EMI, record executives. Capitol released the song in the US in May 1963 where it spent 14 weeks on Billboard's Top Singles chart, peaking at number one for three weeks, a feat that has yet to be

²⁸ Schilling 198.

²⁹ Kitagawa Junko "Some aspects of Japanese popular music" *Popular Music* 10 (1991): 306.

number one for three weeks, a feat that has yet to be duplicated by any other Japanese artist. The song even spent four weeks on the US R&B chart, peaking at number 18. The song spent 13 weeks on the British charts, starting in June 1963, peaking at number 6. By spring of 1964, the single had sold enough in the United States to earn a gold record, awarded for singles that sold over a million units.³⁰

In many ways, the success of the song was something of a fluke. It was released at a fortuitous time in popular music, which was dominated by young, good looking singers like Paul Anka and Connie Francis singing ballads and dance fads like "The Twist." In America at this time, there was also an unusual tolerance for songs sung in other languages. Thus, not only did "Sukiyaki" become a big hit, but also "Dominic" by The Singing Nun, sung in Italian, became popular during this time. Thus, since the song was able to resonate on several levels, despite the difference of language, it did well. Furthermore, it sounded quite unlike anything else heard in popular music at the time, yet was somehow familiar, making the song distinctive. One of the sad ironies of many of the later attempts to break into international market by Japanese artists is the tendency for many of the artist to attempt to reproduce exactly the expectations of Western popular music. However, in the process, the music gets lost in the shuffle. The artists that had the greatest success in the international market tended to have a particular quality that made them simultaneously distinctive yet familiar.

³⁰ Mitsui Tôru "Introduction" *Popular Music* 10 (1991): 262 note 1; Schilling 216.

that made them simultaneously distinctive yet familiar.

English lyrics for "Sukiyaki" were rapidly composed, and a number of artists have covered the song, from lounge singer Wayne Newton, to disco group A Taste Of Honey, who had a hit with it in 1979, to R&B group 4 P.M., who had a hit with it in 1995 to tejano³¹ singer Selena. While the music remains the same in all these versions, what is interesting is that the English lyrics are totally different from the original Japanese. The Japanese lyrics are upbeat, talking about stoically pressing on through the seasons, despite troubles, while the English lyrics are a plaintive lament about lost love.

When Sakamoto arrived in the United States to appear on the *Steve Allen Show* in August 1963, observers were struck by his good looks and charm.³² It was these same qualities that made him a star on Japanese television and subsequently in Japanese pop music. His success, along with other similar American acts popular in both Japan and the United States, such as Connie Francis, Fabian, and Pat Boone, prompted talent agencies to begin searching out potential young singers with wholesome good looks and charm. The ideal singer was to portray themselves as average and *kawaii* [cute], rather than having a great singing voice. The goal was to project an image of being harmless, bright, chipper and eager to please. The talent agencies went to great lengths to train these young people, who would later become

³¹ a form of Tex-Mex Latin popular music, that tends to be upbeat and dance oriented.

³² Schilling 216.

to become known as *aidoru* [idol] and *tarento* [talent].³³

Another change that popular music underscored was the development of a youth culture. Aided by the concept of the teenager imported into Japan after the war (though antecedents of the idea can be seen in the *moga* and *mobo* of the 1920s³⁴) and increased economic prosperity and educational opportunity, those from junior high to college age began to develop into a distinct market, with their own separate tastes. It was the increased emphasis on attending high school and college, first in the urban areas in the mid-1950s and spreading throughout the country by the mid-1960s, that aided this transformation. The shift can be seen especially in how the folk and group sounds artists targeted young people as their primary audience.

However, in the same year as the Tokyo Olympics, 1964, a fundamental change in Japanese popular music began to take place. In February 1964, the Beatles released their first single in Japan, "I Wanna Hold Your Hand." The popularity of the song prompted a wave of copy bands belting out Japanese versions of that song as well as "Please Please Me." In May, Fujii Koichi released a cover of the surf guitar group Astronaut's "Movin'" with Fujii's own scat vocals. In June, a former rockabilly group called Teraichi Takeshi and the Blue Tears put out Japan's first surf music album "Korezo Surfing [This Is Surfing]" with songs composed by the group.³⁵

³³ Jeff Yang and Claudine Ko "Idol Singers" *Eastern Standard Time: A Guide to Asian Influence on American Culture: from Astro Boy to Zen Buddhism*, eds. Jeff Yang, Dina Gan and Jerry Hong (New York: Mariner-Houghton, 1997) 265. Subsequently referred to as *EST*.

³⁴ "modern girl" and "modern boy", respectively. Similar to the flapper of the 1920s and the 1930s.

Surfing [This Is Surfing]" with songs composed by the group.³⁵ These three events began the *Ereki* [electric guitar] Boom. It also signaled that Japanese pop music was moving from just listening and imitating Western pop music to using the familiarity to create original songs and new musical idioms.

The years 1945 to 1965 were years of rapid change in Japanese society, both socially and musically. Numerous musical styles, including rock, country and rockabilly, came to Japan and were adopted by a wide range of performers and fans. Eventually, these styles become their own, as demonstrated in the next chapter. While in the beginning, many artists were simply imitating songs and styles of the West, that imitation helped create a basis for creative interpretations of Western idioms and make them truly Japanese.

³⁵ Schilling 199-200.

CHAPTER III

INDIGENIZATION: 1965-1985

It was no coincidence that by the mid-1960s, a series of major changes in both Japanese society and popular music were beginning. The first generation born after the war were coming of age, and knew directly little or nothing of the hardships of the war and prewar years. The war acted as a disjuncture point for musical tastes, and by extension more general consumer tastes. As Fujio Fujio notes, those born before the war generally prefer *enka* while those born after about 1960 prefer Western-style pop. Those born during the 1940s and 1950s are in a transitional "grey zone," liking either *enka* or Western-style pop.¹ The music produced when this first generation was coming of age, in the 1950s and 1960s, is also transitional. *Enka* remained a strong seller during those years, yet country, rockabilly, group sounds, folk, surf music, and covers of Western pop songs were all major threads of the Japanese pop music tapestry of those years, sometimes performed by the same artist, as in the case of Sakamoto Kyû.

Yet, from this transitional postwar generation, a number of artists began playing folk, surf music and Group Sounds,

¹ Fujio Fujio *Karaoke Bunka Daikakumei* [The Karaoke Cultural Revolution] (Tokyo: Chiobunsha 1994) 66-67.

of artists began playing folk, surf music and Group Sounds, often starting in college. Of the three styles, the folk "revival" of the 1960s has the closest association with college campuses. Mitsui theorizes that the attraction to the folk movement for the urban, educated young was a combination of the domination of America and American music in Japan since the end of the war, the idealized image of America as symbol of democracy and a naïve, nostalgic longing for what had been lost in the rapid urbanization and industrialization of Japan in the 1950s and 1960s.² This nostalgia for the past, either real or imagined, would appear in different forms later on. Thus, the folk "revival" in Japan took the form not of Japanese folk songs, though a few artists did incorporate Japanese musical idioms into their music, but instead was largely based on the music of The Brothers Four, Peter, Paul & Mary, Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan.

While much of the music produced in Japan between 1965 and 1970 was still largely dependent on emulating trends in Western popular music - British rock, American folk revivalism, surf music - it was Japanese adaptations of these trends that led directly to a distinct Japanese pop music style. What is also important about music of this period and throughout the 1970s and 1980s is the growing dominance of songs composed in a Western style by Japanese song writers, primarily drawing from rock or folk, as opposed to the Western-influenced *enka* or more general *kayôkyoku* styles. There was also an overall increase in record sales, primarily among Japanese artists. In 1968, record sales totaled 120

² Mitsui, "Reception" 284.

among Japanese artists. In 1968, record sales totaled 120 million units, to become the second largest market in the world behind the United States. Over 40% of that figure, though, was classified as *kayôkyoku*.³ One of the most famous and well known *enka* songs, which by this time had become a distinct subcategory of *kayôkyoku*, "Mournful Sake" by Misora Hibari, debuted in 1966.⁴ While *ereki*, Group Sounds and folk were rising in popularity during this period, *enka* songs like "Mournful Sake" were still a major force and presence on the Japanese pop charts. Western style pop music was not the most prevalent style of the period, but its popularity was expanding and it laid the groundwork for the subsequent domination of the style in the 1970s.

Another factor in the development of Japanese popular music in the 1960s is the emergence of international popular music, long before the emergence of global practices, such as transnational capital and the emergence of a truly global media, in the 1970s.⁵ While artists like Paul Anka had visited Japan as early as 1959, tours of artists ranging from Pete Seeger to The Ventures and The Beatles, starting in the early 1960s, had a major impact. Their visits indicate that Japan had reached a point as an industrial nation with enough disposable income to support the visit of an international pop singer. Secondly, their visits signaled that a sufficient number of fans could be drawn in order to support the shows. This suggests that enough people had integrated

³ Komota et al. 47.

⁴ Tansman 125.

⁵ Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake "Introduction: Tracking The Global/Local" *Global/Local: Cultural Production and The Transnational Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke UP 1996) 4-5.

the shows. This suggests that enough people had integrated the music into their lives so that they could appreciate and identify with it.

These tours were part of an overall "consumer revolution" during the 1960s. Incomes between 1961 and 1967 rose at a rate of 10.4% a year, driven primarily by successful growth in the automobile, steel and electronics industries.⁶ This created an atmosphere of great optimism for the future. People of all ages now had more disposable income than before and a wider range of consumer goods were now available- not only in the urban areas but all across the country. More people had the money to purchase record players and records to play on them, not to mention televisions to watch their favorite singers perform.

The 1960s was a time in which people believed anything was possible and there was a general enthusiastic adopting of elements of contemporary Western culture by youth. This included Western style pop. After decades of difficult times, caused by The Great Depression, war and the Occupation, people no longer had to worry about acquiring basic goods like food and shelter and could focus on other things. At the same time, this optimism was fueled by events such as the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, which was widely regarded as a symbol of Japan fully entering the contemporary world. By hosting the Olympics, in conjunction with the economic prosperity, the feeling was Japan was truly modern (i.e. Western) and as such should look and act the part.

⁶ Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and The Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy 1925-1975* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP 1982) 230-31, 252.

Western) and as such should look and act the part.

One of the first visits by a foreign artist to have a direct impact on Japanese popular music was the touring of surf music acts and the subsequent *Ereki* ("electric") Boom in Japan. The January 1965 tour of Japan by the Ventures and the Astronauts served as a further stimulus to the *Ereki* Boom. The two bands played fourteen dates in five cities to sellout crowds, inspiring mainly young Japanese males to buy electric guitars and to finger the chords of "Walk Don't Run" and "Pipeline." Domestic guitar manufacturers couldn't keep up with the demand, with sales totaling 760,000, a figure that has yet to be equaled.⁷

By June 1965, Fuji TV had a battle of the bands show featuring many of these newly formed electric guitar bands. Then in July and August 1965 the Ventures came back to Japan, covering 58 dates and drew a total of 170,000 fans. However, there was some backlash to the *Ereki* Boom as during the height of the rockabilly craze. For example, the Board of Education in Ashikaga, Tochigi Prefecture banned the playing of electric guitars in public and Shizuoka Prefecture cracked down on dances featuring *ereki* bands. The general feeling was that the music was unwholesome and disruptive to youth. Yet, several factors helped sustain the boom longer than the rockabilly fad. First of all, the bands were getting exposure on television and putting out recordings, something rockabilly groups had a difficult time doing. This was due in part to increasing general domestic record sales, which made the recordings of any Japanese musician more attractive

⁷ Schilling 200.

made the recordings of any Japanese musician more attractive to the record companies. There was also a wider acceptance of Western style popular music than in the 1950s, because of the success of artists like Sakamoto Kyû and The Peanuts. Finally, the movement was not just focused in Tokyo but had spread nationwide, due to tours by groups like the Ventures and television exposure.⁸

At about the same time, another important musical idiom began to take shape. A folk movement was inspired by the tours of Japan starting in late 1963 by Pete Seeger, who played a combination of traditional American folk songs and protest music. The initial base for the movement was drawn from a group of young, college-educated people who previously had a liking for country and western and bluegrass music. By 1966, this Tokyo-centered movement was producing its own music in the same style as Seeger.⁹

The main thrust of this folk boom was not the protest music that Seeger played, but instead, music played by the Kingston Trio, the Brothers Four and Peter, Paul and Mary. The music was primarily acoustic guitar based, with a combination of apolitical or muted original songs and traditional songs like "Greensleeves" or "Tom Dooley." The Japanese performers initially drew from these groups' repertoire. While most of the young people who got into folk music took it up as a hobby, Mike Maiki had a hit with "*Bara ga Saita* [The Rose Has Bloomed]" in 1966. The song sold 700,000 copies. Part of the reason for the success of the

⁸ Schilling 201.

⁹ Mitsui "Reception" 281-82; Komota, et al. 50.

700,000 copies. Part of the reason for the success of the song was that it tapped into a larger trend of songs that emphasized the joys of home. Komota et al. identify several songs during the late 1960s that use the theme of owning a home in a small town; a nostalgic reaction to the realities of the period, with more and more people living in hastily built apartment houses in urban areas.¹⁰

At the same time, the music and singing of Bob Dylan was gathering an audience in Japan. Dylan's songs were first introduced to Japan through the Pete Seegar concerts and through a syndicated folk music program on FEN. It was the influence of Dylan on the later folk boom and the singer-songwriters of the 1970s that would prove the most lasting contribution of this movement.¹¹

While the Japanese version of the folk "revival" was gaining strength, the *Ereki* Boom was also growing stronger. The Spiders released "*Furi Furi* [Shake Shake]" in May 1965, the first Japanese interpretation of the Liverpool sound. In March 1966, Blue Comets released "*Aoi Hitomi* [Blue Eyes]." The song was written initially with English lyrics, something not uncommon to the many American pop covers of the early 1960s, but this time the song was composed by a Japanese for the Japanese market. In July of that year, a Japanese language version of the song sold over 500,000 copies. These two songs, in conjunction with the success of "*Bara ga Saita*," signaled that people were willing to buy Japanese-composed Western style pop songs. Suddenly, the cover songs

¹⁰ Komota et al. 49-51; Schilling 309; Mitsui, "Reception" 282.

¹¹ Mitsui, "Reception" 282-83.

composed Western style pop songs. Suddenly, the cover songs and the surf instrumentals that had defined Western style pop in the early 1960s were no longer enough.¹²

A large number of the *ereki* bands started adding vocals to their performances. In 1967, these bands were signed to labels in droves. Nearly 30 bands with names like The Outcasts, The Tigers, The Jaguars, The Beavers, and The Tempters all debuted that year. The movement came to be known as Group Sounds (often abbreviated to GS). The GS bands represented the first break in the tight control on content that record and TV companies wanted to exercise, as represented by the *Yôchûi Kayôkyoku Toriatsukai Naiki*, discussed in Chapter Two. Before the GS bands came out, if a songwriter wanted to have his/her song recorded, s/he had to sign an exclusive contract with a record company. Music directors would instruct songwriters on how to write the song and in turn would build up a singer's career. However, the composer of "Aoi Hitomi," Hashimoto Jun, was a freelance song writer. When the song became a hit for Nippon Columbia, this allowed other freelance songwriters to submit their work for singers to sing, starting the breakdown of the old system.¹³

While their songs were all original, many of the GS bands took on images that were similar to some of the more popular Western bands. For example, The Mops adopted the Mod look, with the gold chains, velvet jackets, frilly shirts, knee high lace up boots and long hair. Others took their cue from the Beatles, who toured Japan in 1966, or The Rolling

¹² Komota, et al. 51; Schilling 201.

¹³ Schilling 202.

from the Beatles, who toured Japan in 1966, or The Rolling Stones.¹⁴ The shift to Japanese made Western pop, by acts like the GS bands, coincided with the first year that Japanese music outsold Western artists in Japan. As noted in Chapter One, it was also about this time that the Japanese music market became the second largest in the world. In 1968, when the first yearly music charts were compiled in Japan, Simon and Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence" was the only single by a Western artist in the Top 20, the fifth biggest seller at 810,000 singles. However, Group Sound bands like The Tigers did quite well in sales and the charts were dominated by Japanese groups. The top seller for the year was "*Koi no Kisetu* [Love Season]" by Pinky and Killers which sold over 2,080,000 singles.¹⁵

The Tigers and The Tempters were the two most popular of the first wave of GS bands, and in many ways, the two groups were remarkably similar. Both started out as high school bands, both were fronted by charismatic singers who went on to have long entertainment careers, and both rose to prominence through their frequent television appearances. Sawada Kenji of the Tigers transformed himself into the glam rocker Julie in the 1970s and Hagiwara Ken'ichi of The Tempters became a comedic actor.

Backed by the powerful Watanabe Productions talent agency, The Tigers were soon dubbed the Japanese Beatles, playing alternately romantic ballads and driving rock songs. The band attracted a huge teenage girl following on the

¹⁴ Schilling 202.

¹⁵ Komota, et al. 51-52, 106.

The band attracted a huge teenage girl following on the strength of their music and lead singer Sawada's good looks. The Tigers were the first Japanese group to play an entire show by themselves at the Budokan, a venue that was originally constructed as a sumo arena in 1964 and where the Beatles were the first to play as a music act. The Tigers were also the first act to do a stadium show. The Tempters, on the other hand, had a darker, edgier sound, often compared with The Rolling Stones. The Tempters were also the first Japanese group to travel to Memphis to record.¹⁶

These comparisons with Western bands, like The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, were in part a means of legitimizing the new GS bands. While not directly performing Western music, which was more common in the early 1960s, bands like The Tigers and The Tempters occupied similar roles in Japanese popular music; The Tigers as the teenage heartthrobs, similar to mid 1960s Beatles and The Tempters as the gloomy, bluesy rebels. By equating the bands with The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, it served as both as a shorthand for The Tigers and The Tempters relative roles in Japanese popular music during the late 1960s and as a means of legitimizing their status.

Even though the GS bands were compared to the Beatles or The Rolling Stones, none of them wrote their own music. Most of the songs were written by freelancers such as Hashimoto Jun and were under fairly tight control by the talent agencies. As the Group Sounds era began to wind down, GS groups were being considered by rock purists as a

¹⁶ Schilling 202-04.

GS groups were being considered by rock purists as a contrivance; more like The Monkees than the Beatles.¹⁷

Today, the music of the GS bands overall seems fairly harmless— ballads sung by long haired young men in frilly shirts— but as in the rockabilly era, officials tried to crack down on the groups. The backlash started with the protest of the right wing nationalists at the Beatles 1966 Budokan show, claiming that rock music was a corrupting influence on the “pure” youth of Japan.¹⁸ After reports of injuries at a November 1967 Tigers concert as well as reports of kids running away from home and counterfeiting tickets to follow their favorite bands around the country, government officials reacted. At the peak of the GS boom in 1968, junior and senior high schools began suspending and expelling students who attended GS concerts. Some school districts even posted teachers at concert entrances to nab offenders and printed out lists of forbidden groups, such as The Tigers, in school handbooks. City and prefectural governments refused to give permits to GS bands to use their facilities. NHK stopped inviting the long-haired GS bands, like The Tigers and The Tempters, in favor of the short haired bands, like The Blue Comets and The Wild Ones, who were considered less threatening, for performances on the music programs.¹⁹

These backlashes were symptomatic of a large discontinuity between the prewar and postwar generations. Throughout the 1960s, the postwar generation, most commonly

¹⁷ Schilling 204.

¹⁸ McClure 12.

¹⁹ Schilling 204.

Throughout the 1960s, the postwar generation, most commonly known as the *dankai* or Zenkyoto generation, named after a student group active in numerous antiwar and antiestablishment activities, was often involved with clashes with the establishment. The riots surrounding the signing of the US-Japan Joint Security Pact in June 1960, was the start of this battling, escalating to the take over by student groups of many universities in 1968. As Reischauer notes, part of the pressures on the universities were caused by the explosive growth of the student population and the universities' inadequacy to handle the influx, which mainly fell to the newer private institutions. This inadequacy led to student discontent and eventually to protests and riots.²⁰

Yet, with all this discontent, there was also hope for the future. The rapid economic growth and technological change engendered confidence in liberal politics and democratic government. Dropping out of school was not feared, since it was easy to get a part time job that provided plenty to take care of food and shelter. Underground theater, experimental films by directors like Oshima and rock bands were all further tweaks at the system, no matter what the consequences.²¹

But unlike what happened to rockabilly, the end of the Group Sounds fad came not because of the reaction by television and governments, but because of the nature of the

²⁰ Edwin O. Reischauer *Japan: The Story Of A Nation* 4th ed. (New York: McGraw 1990) 242-43, 262-65; Shinobu Yoshioka "Talkin' 'bout My Generation" *Comparing Cultures: Readings on Contemporary Japan for American Writers* eds. Merry I. White and Sylvan Barnet (Boston: Bedford 1995) 120-21.

²¹ Yoshioka 120-21.

television and governments, but because of the nature of the bands. The fashion of the band was more important than the songs that they sang. By late 1968, over 100 GS bands had released records, totally flooding the market, in the hopes of getting a hit. As more bands tried to go for the Tigers' thirteen year old schoolgirl market, the quality of the music started to drop off. Furthermore, some fans of GS began to become cynical about the bands because they were looking for music that was more "authentic" than the prepackaged bands, as in the mold of the Western rock bands that they often emulated. For most fans, though, the fad for groups had simply run its course. Concert attendance dropped and the albums headed for the cutout bins. By 1971, the largest GS bands, The Tigers, The Spiders, Ox and The Wild Ones had all broken up, ending the Group Sounds era.²²

Aside from the market saturation of GS bands, a renewed folk boom was gathering momentum. This time, the fans were based around the Kansai region surrounding Osaka and inspired more by Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. The new folk boom was angrier in tone than the first, with songs about social issues, and protest songs about Vietnam and the Mutual Security Treaty. The song that really made people take notice of the movement was "*Kaette Kita Yopparai* [The Return Of The Drunk]" by The Folk Crusaders, which sold 1,310,000 singles in 1968. Another song that typifies this movement is "San'ya Blues" by Okabayashi Nobuyasu in 1968, a song about an area of Tokyo where daylaborers reside.²³ These songs

²³ Komota, et al. 53-54, 106; Schilling 309.

²² Schilling 204-05.

an area of Tokyo where daylaborers reside.²³ These songs marked another important break of the broadcast rules drawn up in 1959. Because of their controversial content, radio and television stations refused to broadcast the songs. Nevertheless, the songs became hits; by word of mouth and concerts, people found out about these songs and bought them. This proved to many artists that they didn't need to rely on television and its restrictive rules to become popular.

To further underscore this point, in September 1969, a collection of so-called New Rock groups, made up of those disillusioned with Group Sounds and veterans of the folk music scene, held a concert in Tokyo's Hibiya Park. The groups charged ¥10 admission as a form of declaration of independence from record companies, talent agencies and television networks. Bands such as Powerhouse and Flowers often played in Hibiya Park and it subsequently became a haven for New Rock, which was later merged with the New Music movement.²⁴

At this point, Japanese popular music stood at a crossroads. The tastes of the general public would radically change over the next ten years. The process of presenting and selling stars would undergo a similar change. Even the labels for music would be redefined in some cases.

To see how tastes changed, first it is important to get a snapshot of attitudes towards music at the start of this period. A survey covering popular music was conducted in October 1968 in Tokyo among 320 men and women between the age

²³ Komota, et al. 53-54, 106; Schilling 309.

²⁴ Schilling 205.

October 1968 in Tokyo among 320 men and women between the age of 15 and 44. The survey allowed for respondents to choose more than one style of music that they favored. The most common response was *kayôkyoku* with 60% of respondents saying they favored it followed by popular music (*poppyuraa ongaku*) with 43%. Folk songs were 7th with 21.7%, Group Sounds was 8th with 16.7% and rhythm and blues was 10th with 15.7%. When the results were divided by gender, 53.7% of the men and 66.0% of the women listed *kayôkyoku* as one of their favorite styles. If the women's responses were divided by age, 69.3% of those under 22, and 70% of those over 35 listed *kayôkyoku*.²⁵

Asked who their top 20 favorite artists were, 70% replied Sakamoto Kyû. The interesting thing about Sakamoto is that by the late 1960s, he was no longer considered a rockabilly singer but a respectable singer of *kayôkyoku*. Only one folk singer, Sakura Naomi (6th overall with 59.3%) and one GS group, Blue Comets (19th overall with 50.0%) made the top 20. The remainder of the spots were dominated by *kayôkyoku* and "mood music" singers, like Sakamoto Kyû and The Peanuts (15th overall with 52.3%). These two in particular are significant since at least part of their repertoire was covers of Western pop songs in Japanese. It is important to point out that the styles and artists that were the most popular was a reflection of those that had the most exposure on the television music programs.²⁶

Whether this is a case of people accepting what they are

²⁵ Komota, et al. 63.

²⁶ Komota, et al. 64-65.

Whether this is a case of people accepting what they are given, much in a way that Adorno and others envisioned how popular music worked, or if the television programs were truly reflecting what people's tastes were at the time is hard to determine. Adorno, in his essay, "On Popular Music," stated that popular music was the "social cement" that those running the culture industry used to direct the masses. "The people clamor for what they are going to get anyhow," as Adorno puts it.²⁷ Others are more blunt in saying that popular culture, including music, "is imposed from above."²⁸ But these theories lack any sort of discussion of why this type of music is popular, other than Adorno's dividing listeners as either "rhythmically obedient" or "emotional."²⁹ Regarding the Japanese music programs, an argument could be made that the shows were being controlled by those in power—record companies and television network executives. The *Yôchûi Kayôkyoku Toriatsukia Naiki*,³⁰ which was still in effect at this time, is an example of their power to control what was and was not to be performed on television.

But why were the Group Sounds acts able to get on television in the first place? Why were they not more popular? What about the folk singers who were able to circumvent television all together, yet still made a impact (albeit a small one) on the popularity survey? While these questions help to complicate the often unilinear arguments

²⁷ Theodor W. Adorno "On Popular Music" *Cultural Theory And Popular Culture: A Reader* 2nd ed., ed. John Storey (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P 1998) 206.

²⁸ Dwight Macdonald "A Theory Of Mass Culture" *Cultural Theory And Popular Culture* 23.

²⁹ Adorno 207.

³⁰ See Chapter Two.

questions help to complicate the often unilinear arguments that Adorno and his followers make, the more fundamental question of whether television was the reflector or director of tastes remains unanswered. Television had elements of both; in order for a song to become popular it has to be promoted, with television being foremost means of promotion at the time. However, the examples cited above demonstrate that the control was not complete and was subject to a wide range of factors.

But as Japan entered the 1970s, popular music, television and the society as a whole would undergo changes. In turn, people's relationship with popular music would also be effected. The general mood of hope for the future that was a major part of the 1960s evaporated in the early 1970s. The oil shocks of 1973, the Nixon shock of 1971, when the fixed exchange rate of 360 yen to the US dollar was converted to a floating exchange rate, Minamata disease and concerns for the environment, and the precipitous decline in heavy industry all contributed to a sense of disillusionment with the perpetual growth of the 1950s and 1960s. There was also a sense of weariness over the protracted battles of the 1960s. All of this uncertainty led to a turning inward to focus on personal concerns— a sense of security in an uncertain enviroment. This need for security— in getting the the right sort of education in order to get the right sort of job— could explain the historical highs of people attending school above the compulsory level. In turn, the correlation between the level of education, where it was received and the type of job eventually attained, with the *sarariiman*

type of job eventually attained, with the *sarariiman* remaining the ideal, became even stronger.³¹ By focusing on getting the right education and getting the right job (or getting married), and not worrying about the larger issues that often drove the protests of the 1960s, you could do "what everybody else is doing, so you can feel secure."³²

The music of this era reflects this uneasy mixture of disillusionment and inward focus. Through a combination of efforts by Group Sounds, New Rock and folk artists, and aided by the increased ubiquity of secondary education, Western pop music had become integrated into the Japanese musical idiom; no longer just a foreign style, but a style of music to express Japanese feelings, thoughts and ideas. But at the same time, because there was a feeling of insecurity of the age, there was a shrinking away from controversy, and this was reflected in the music. No longer favored was the daring of the second folk boom or even the controversy of Group Sounds, but songs with safe themes of home, personal problems, and personal relationships.³³

In some respects, these songs of a more personal nature reflect the popularity of the singer/songwriters in America and the U.K. in the early 1970s. In both cases the songs were often written and performed by those familiar with the folk "revival," and the themes were drawn from personal experience. The feeling of intimacy, both in the lyrics and the understated accompaniment that became more common in the 1970s, gave a feeling of legitimacy, and by extension, tried

³¹ Allinson 126-29; Tanaka 300-01.

³² Yoshioka 121.

³³ Yoshioka 120.

1970s, gave a feeling of legitimacy, and by extension, tried to convey that to the music in general.³⁴

Not only the tone of the music had changed as Japan moved into the 1970s, but also how people reacted to popular music in general. Before, if a singer or group had a song that was a big hit, they could travel the country for about three years on the strength of that one song. But as the 1970s progressed, once a song ceased being popular, the singer would often be forgotten by the majority of the population. In part this was due to the sheer number of artists that were putting out records at this time. With the increased record sales in all musical styles, not just with Group Sounds bands, record companies were developing and releasing large numbers of artists. For every 10,000 records a label put out in a year, 600 were by new artists, 100 of the records would become hits and 5 or 6 of the artists would go on to be stars.³⁵ While the market was becoming increasingly competitive, because of the sheer number of albums and singles the record companies were issuing, this allowed some bands to carve out niche markets like folk and New Rock.

Influenced by Eric Clapton and Led Zeppelin, the New Rock bands fell into roughly two categories. One side felt that the true rock music was that done in English. They felt that rock in Japanese didn't sound right. Furthermore, Japanese lyrics to a rock beat was associated with the

³⁴ David Hatch and Stephen Millward *From Blues To Rock: An analytical history of pop music* (Worcester, UK: Manchester UP 1987) 157-58; Michael Campbell *And The Beat Goes On: An introduction to popular music in America, 1840 to present* (New York: Schirmer 1996) 288.

³⁵ Komota, et al. 82.

Japanese lyrics to a rock beat was associated with the reviled Group Sounds. Some even had the ambitious goal to play internationally and felt that Japanese lyrics would be a hindrance, a fact more or less proved correct over the next thirty years. However, another faction of rock fans and performers believed that if rock music was to become something more than just a fringe interest, the lyrics needed to be in Japanese.³⁶

When the band Happy End released the song "Yudemem [Boiled Noodles]" in 1970 and their self-titled album in August of that year, it caused quite a stir. The band started to form a sound that was not trying to be a direct copy of any Western band, but concentrated on playing songs that the group wrote. At same time, the group used Japanese lyrics in their music. The songs tried to avoid many of the clichés that surrounded *kayōkyoku*. The success of Happy End in bringing together rock and Japanese lyrics showed to other artists that using the proper technique, it could sound completely natural.³⁷

At the same time, folk music's popularity was increasing. The folk inspired "Kekkon Shiyō yo [Let's Get Married]" by Yoshida Takuro became a hit in 1972, selling 420,000 copies. Stylistically, the song was indicative of the changing mood of Japan at the time, focusing on more domestic issues, such as in the first folk boom. While nominally the song was called folk and Yoshida favored jeans

³⁶ Schilling 109, 205.

³⁷ Nicholas D. Kent, "Harumi Hosono" *Japanese Electronic Music* 13 Feb 1999. <http://www.oceanofk.org/artskool/jem/hh.html> [18 July 1999]; Ogawa Hiroshi *Ongakusuru Shakai* [Music Playing Society] (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 1988) 55-56; McClure 115; Schilling 205.

nominally the song was called folk and Yoshida favored jeans and plaid to the suits of the *enka* singers, musically it was closer to the "mood music" singers and lyrically similar to *kayôkyoku* songs that were still popular and dominated the 1968 music survey.³⁸ The style of music that Yoshida and others played came to be called New Music.

Lyrically, *enka* and New Music often covered the same type of subjects. However, with New Music there was a distinct change. *Enka* songs, especially those sung by female singers, often had lyrics where the woman was to blame for a failed relationship and was left to cry alone and helpless. New Music songs, on the other hand, emphasized strong women, who were either wronged by a man, or were going to carry on boldly with their lives. This change from the strong man, weak woman of *enka* to a more equal relationship both signals a change in how women perceived themselves and prefigured the social changes that would occur starting in the 1980s.³⁹

What set these New Musicians apart most of all was their refusal to appear on TV. Another performer that typified this early attitude was Inoue Yoshi. His 1972 debut "*Kasa ga Nai* [I Have No Umbrella]" became a hit. The song was about how despite all the troubles in the world, his only concern is not having an umbrella for a date. Inoue's 1973 debut album "*Kôri no Sekai* [World of Ice]" sold a million copies, a first for a Japanese artist. Yet neither Inoue nor Yoshida appeared on television because they didn't want to play shortened versions of songs or to be judged simply on

³⁸ Komota, et al. 84, 106; Schilling 309-10.

³⁹ "Nyû Myûshikku no Kashi: 'Jôsei Yûi' Masumasu [New Music Lyrics: Increasing 'Female Superiority']" *Asahi Shimbun* 22 Oct 1993: n.pag.

shortened versions of songs or to be judged simply on appearance. Instead, they relied on concerts, radio airplay and record sales.⁴⁰

Other changes were going on in the music business. One major change was the dropping in 1973 of the strict broadcast rules drawn up originally in 1959. In its place, a less restrictive set of rules was drawn up. This was in response to the New Rock and New Music artists who could effectively bypass television and as an attempt to present a diversified music field, though some broadcasters, notably NHK, still stayed mainly with the *kayôkyoku* singers.⁴¹

The development of New Music coincided with a number of social changes, especially for women. Starting in the mid-1970s, the average age of marriage began to increase and the fertility rates decreased. Women became able during this time to define themselves more readily in number of different roles outside of marriage and motherhood— employee, student, et cetera. This, in turn, meant that educational and employment opportunities had increased, though still limited in scope. With these increased opportunities, women could do something else with their lives other than simply become wives, while coincidentally often entering the work force and earning money.⁴²

This transformation of young women into independent economic actors, in turn, had a profound impact on popular culture and how it was marketed. Because young women were becoming more financially independent, they became a prime

⁴⁰ Kawabata 338; Schilling 310.

⁴¹ Komota, et al. 82.

⁴² Tanaka 299, 302-03.

becoming more financially independent, they became a prime audience to sell a wide range of goods and services to. By the 1980s, young women in their 20s had the largest amount of disposable income of any segment of the population. Cosmetics, fashion, travel and music all tried to capture the yen of these young women, who were working well paying jobs and had at least a 2-year college degree. It is little coincidence that during the 1970s and 1980s that all of those commodities became closely entwined through marketing and advertisements.

Another important change to the musical landscape occurred in 1973. Pinkara Trio released "*Onna no Michi* [Woman Road]." on Nippon Columbia. The record sold an incredible 3,260,000 copies. What is important about this song is not only the enormous sales that it generated, but the idol (*aidoru*) phenomenon in Japan that it initiated. While the development of idols has undergone several changes since the 1970s, the basic system remains intact to the present day. Called *kawaiko-chan* for most of the 1970s before becoming *aidoru* or *tarento* when males began to come up through the same system in the early 1980s, idols were often young women discovered by a talent agency. By the late 1970s, record companies and talent agencies were running talent contests to find potential idols. The singers were then groomed, taught how to sing and dance and present themselves in public. The most important quality sought from these *kawaiko-chan* and *aidoru* was not their singing ability (in fact, that was often a secondary consideration), but their cute faces and their

ability to carry themselves well on television.⁴³

Agencies such as Watanabe Productions and Taiyô Music would sign the potential stars at the age young of 12 or 13, with the parents signing the contract on their behalf. The contract would last as long as 10 years and during that entire time, the star would be paid a salary, often a modest one. If the slightest hint of any scandal or controversy arose, such as illegal drug use or homosexuality, that would be grounds for immediate termination of the contract. When the production company felt the idol was ready, they would make a demo tape and present it to the various record labels. Rarely in these contracts were the stars themselves entitled to royalties. When they were, the royalties would be as low as 0.5% of sales. The majority of the money would go back to the production company and record company. The talent agencies and record company justified this practice as compensation for both the time spent on developing the star and to cover potential idols that didn't make it.⁴⁴

The ones that didn't make it often wound up doing many other things; some just returning to normal life, others winding up in pornographic films. Even if an idol became successful with a song or two, that did not guarantee a steady source of income. Once an idol could no longer be passed off as a teenager or got married, that was the end of the idol's career. Because of the contracts with the talent agencies, idols had little to show for it except a few

⁴³ Komota, et al. 83.

⁴⁴ Steve McClure, "You Look Like A Music Star" *Billboard* 31 Aug 1996: 76.

singles and perhaps an album.⁴⁵

There are several reasons why idols remained popular with record companies and audiences, especially until the late 1980s. For the record companies and production agencies, it was a means of populating the television music shows in the increasingly fragmented and expanding music markets. The *kayôkyoku* singers of the 1960s were losing their popularity with younger viewers, who had begun to favor more Westernized pop music sounds, typified by the Group Sounds, New Rock and New Music movements. While not precisely idols, the GS groups in many ways were a prototype for the idols. Young people were buying records made by young singers who were good looking, had a good fashion sense and sang love songs. Idol singers followed much the same formula. Also, because of the centralization of the entertainment industry in Tokyo and the intense competition to get product out, the idol singers could put out music that was homogeneous and relatively safe, yet give the illusion of differentiation- something the New Music and New Rock groups were actively railing against.⁴⁶

For the audience, there was both the appeal of seeing cute young girls (and boys) wearing the latest fashions and the image that the idol was really Mr. or Ms. Average; that anyone could make it if they just try hard enough- interestingly the same attitude held by many with regards to the school exams and the developing meritocracy. Large

⁴⁵ McClure "Music Star"; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 22; Yang and Ko 265.

⁴⁶ Judith Ann Herd, "Trends and tastes in Japanese popular music: a case-study of the 1982 Yamaha World Popular Music Festival" *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 76.

the school exams and the developing meritocracy. Large segments of the audience wanted to watch amateurs— and professionals acting amateurishly— as a comfort that every one was the same.⁴⁷

While idols and New Musicians were gaining popularity, some New Rock bands set their sights on gaining an international audience. Since late 1970, major US and European acts ranging from John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers and Chicago to Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple began to make stops at Japanese festivals, stadiums and the Budokan a regular part of their world tours. In turn, the Japanese rock band appropriately named Samurai was the first tour to Europe. Later, their bassist Yamauchi Tetsu joined Free and Rod Stewart and The Faces, becoming the first Japanese rock musician to actively seek a career outside of Japan. A few bands like Sadistic Mika Band released albums in England and toured a little in England and Europe. Sadistic Mika Band toured England with Roxy Music, whose producer produced the band's second album, in 1975.⁴⁸ Other bands, such as RC Succession, Carmen Maki and Oz, Zunô Keisatsu [Brain Police], and Sugar Babe gained a greater audience along with the idol and New Music singers within Japan.⁴⁹ But by the mid-1970s, these bands and other similar ones were considered part of the New Music movement.

Record executives liked the New Music label since it was so vague and didn't have the negative connotations that rock

⁴⁷ Rohlen 311-12; Schilling 166.

⁴⁸ Rick Tanaka and Tony Barrell, "Japan's New Music: The Human Face Of Technopolis" in *The New Rock 'n' Roll* by Stuart Coupe and Glenn A. Baker (New York: St. Martin's, 1983) 54.

⁴⁹ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 13.

so vague and didn't have the negative connotations that rock or folk had. The primary criterion for the label was that the singer or group wrote and performed primarily their own material. Musically, this covered everything from the soft ballads of the former folk singers to the tropical-influenced albums of "Harry" Hosono, formerly of Happy End, to the harder edged rock of RC Succession and Sadistic Mika Band. However, the most popular New Music artists were the women singer-songwriters like Yumo Akiko, who debuted in 1976 with the album *Japanese Girl* and played piano on Little Feat's debut, Osaki Ami, and Arai Yumi (a.k.a. Yuming).⁵⁰

Arai Yumi got her start writing "*Ai no Totsuzen* [Suddenly Love]" for former Spiders frontman Kahashi Katsumi at the age of 15 and was hailed as a prodigy. In 1973, she debuted with her own songs "*Kitto Iuru* [I Can Definitely Say]" backed with "*Hikôki Kumo* [Airplane Clouds]" and her first album *Hikôki Kumo*. Not wishing to be considered simply a folk musician, since she wrote her own music, she rejected the jeans and flannel look, favoring long flowing dresses. Like many New Musicians, her songs shared with folk songs many of the same musical structures and themes of self determination, but the subject of the songs were often pointed inwards. The emphasis of her music was more with the overall sound of the song rather than just the lyrics.⁵¹

In 1975, Arai signed with the newly formed label For Life. Owned by four folk/New Music musicians, Yoshida Takuro, Inoue Yosui, Komuro Hitoshi, and Izumiya Shigeru, and

⁵⁰ Schilling 312-13; Ogawa 46, 52.

⁵¹ Schilling 310-12.

Takuro, Inoue Yosui, Komuro Hitoshi, and Izumiya Shigeru, and consisting of 33 employees and ¥30 million in capital, it was the first major challenge to the major labels. Small labels had existed before in Japan. Many of the New Rock bands were on these smaller labels. However, they had trouble getting into the national record chains and local shops because of the domination by the major labels. Often, these smaller labels would be limited to speciality shops and larger outlets in the big cities. For Life, however, was the first independent label to have enough financial power to gain a place in stores nationwide. Furthermore, For Life gave the artists an extraordinary amount of artistic freedom and did not dictate which singers could sing which songs. Arai took advantage of this situation, and her first two singles on the label, "*Rouge no Dengon* [Rouge Message]" and "*Ano Hi ni Kaeritai* [I Want to Return To That Day]" as well as her album *Cobalt Hour*, became huge hits for For Life. In 1976, her record and tape sales totaled ¥3.17 billion- an extraordinary amount for a Japanese musician.⁵²

By 1978, New Music outsold both *enka* and idol singers, and by 1980, New Music accounted for more than half the records and tapes sold in Japan. This was part of a broad based change in Japanese popular music.⁵³ By the mid-1970s, the *kayôkyoku* singers of the 1960s were popular only with those older than 30. Those under 30, the dominant consumers, were now listening to either idols singers or New Musicians. In 1979, *enka* only accounted for 18.2% of sales, while

⁵² Schilling 309-10, 312.

⁵³ Schilling 313.

In 1979, *enka* only accounted for 18.2% of sales, while Western influenced pop & rock (which includes idol singers) totaled 70.1% of sales.⁵⁴ Even the idol singers, with the success of the broad range of styles of the New Musicians, were singing in an ever increasing range of chording, genres and even emotional registers.⁵⁵

It was in this sort of environment that three extremely important events occurred musically, all between 1976 and 1978. The first was the idol boom, started off by Pink Lady. The second was a shift from image-oriented followings, based largely on the looks of the singer and the lyrics, to a more sound-oriented following, exemplified by Yellow Magic Orchestra and Southern All Stars. Finally, there was the debut of Champloose and the beginning of the mainstreaming of Okinawan and other ethnic pop into the Japanese pop music lexicon.⁵⁶

As noted above, there had been idols before the late 1970s, but it wasn't until the late 1970s and into the early 1980s that the single charts and the airwaves were dominated by their presence. While they weren't the first idol duo, Pink Lady set the standard both in terms of popularity and the evaporation of that popularity. Between 1976 and 1980, the duo had nine straight number one singles, each selling more than 630,000 copies. But, virtually overnight the duo slipped into obscurity.⁵⁷

Pink Lady consisted of Nemoto Mitsuyo (a.k.a. Mii) and

⁵⁴ Okada Maki "Musical characteristics of *enka*" trans. Gerald Groemer *Popular Music* 10 (1991): 302.

⁵⁵ Schilling 313.

⁵⁶ Kitagawa 306-07; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 13.

⁵⁷ Schilling 186; Komota, et al. 104.

Pink Lady consisted of Nemoto Mitsuyo (a.k.a. Mii) and Masuda Keiko (a.k.a. Kei). The two first appeared on TV in February 1976 on the show *Star Tanjô!* (A Star Is Born!) as a school girl folk duo from Shizuoka, wearing high bib overalls and having a rustic charm. However, when the duo returned in August that year to promote their new single "*Peppa Keibu* [Pepper Police Inspector]" on Victor, they had undergone a complete makeover. Instead of the overalls, the two sang disco influenced songs with catchy lyrics and wore slinky spangled minidresses. The most astonishing thing about them was their dancing- a weird mixture of youthful vitality, sexy moves and robotic precision. The two women would perform a strictly choreographed dance routine tightly in unison and reproduced exactly for every television performance.⁵⁸

When their second single "S.O.S." was released in December of 1976, the Pink Lady boom began in earnest. The song sold 655,000 copies and was the first of their nine consecutive number one singles. During their peak years of 1977 and 1978, Pink Lady appeared on every television music and variety show, guaranteeing a 2 to 3 point ratings jump. To further cash in on their popularity, the duo signed with 11 companies to do advertising. *Eigo*, an education magazine, saw its circulation surge by 100,000 compared with its closest rival after they signed the duo to appear on its magazine covers. The ice cream brand that signed the duo saw its sales increase fourfold. Kids clamored for Pink Lady shampoo and books describing how to copy the duo's moves.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Schilling 187-88.

⁵⁸ Schilling 187.

shampoo and books describing how to copy the duo's moves.⁵⁹

The attraction for Pink Lady was their instant recognizability, their tightly controlled dance moves that resembled a pair of marionettes, and their simple yet catching singing. Preschoolers and elementary students could easily pick up on the duo's singing and dancing. They were popular with older people since the songs were easily reproducible yet enjoyable. Their most important quality, however, was their child-like nature. The singing of the duo was simple and unadorned yet enthusiastic. The themes of the songs, like "S.O.S." which warns girls about going out with men "since they are like wolves," were aggressively unsophisticated and simple. This was in marked contrast to the air of maturity that often surrounded New Music. Even on their television appearance, as if to underscore the image of the songs, the duo would emphasize this child-like quality. The popularity of childish songs and groups, like The Finger Five of the mid 1970s, had been slowly building.⁶⁰ However, with Pink Lady, this combination made industry people sit up and take notice. The power the duo had to increase both ratings and sales, along with the trend of placing idols in advertisements, set an ideal that talent agencies tried to reproduce throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.

When Pink Lady broke, their success on television led to their success both in record sales and promotion of other products, a trend that had become increasingly prominent since the mid-1960s. At that time, just as the music

⁵⁹ Schilling 187-88.

⁶⁰ Ogawa 130-32.

since the mid-1960s. At that time, just as the music industry in Japan was starting to transform, the relationship between television, commercials and popular music became stronger. By 1965, the primary means of promotion for a performer was appearing on the television music shows. If a performer appeared on certain shows, such as *Kohaku Uta Gassen*, the popular NHK New Years' Eve music program, it could make or break a career.⁶¹

Yet, just as the triumvirate of television, commercials and popular music was becoming solidified, efforts to bypass it were forming. Folk, New Rock and New Music artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s tended to avoid television exposure and instead relied on concerts and word of mouth to drive sales. Many folk artists couldn't get on television anyway, since their songs and look were too controversial. Instead of the long hair, jeans and flannel shirts favored by the folk singers, the television networks wanted the performers who appeared on the screen to be neatly groomed and dressed, preferably with formal dresses for women and suits for the men. Group Sounds bands were able to appear on television with their long hair and neo-Edwardian suits. However, when a group got into trouble, like The Tigers, they no longer appeared. Group Sounds bands were not the only ones barred from television when controversy arose. In 1973, when it was revealed that Misora Hibari, one of the most popular *enka* singers ever and a staple of shows like *Kohaku Uta Gassen*, had a younger brother with *yakuza* (Japanese mafia) connections, she was not invited to that year's

⁶¹ Schilling 95; Kimura 318.

mafia) connections, she was not invited to that year's program.⁶²

Still the composition of shows like *Kohaku Uta Gassen* reflected the tastes of the majority of people, with its *enka* and Western influenced light pop songs. *Kohaku Uta Gassen* regularly was on over 70% of televisions on New Year's Eve and peaked at 81.3% in 1963. By the mid 1960s, over 90% of the homes in Japan had at least one television. Other music programs, while not nearly as popular as *Kohaku Uta Gassen* regularly did well in the ratings, further underscoring the importance of appearing on one these shows.⁶³

But as New Music and other genres of music started to become more popular in the mid-1970s, despite minimal television exposure, the television music programs began to lose their importance. Record companies used them primarily to promote their new idols, such as Pink Lady, but New Music artists like Yuming refused to appear on the shows, or would do it on their terms, such as Southern All Stars, discussed below. Furthermore, artists, both idols and New Musicians, were beginning to find other means of promoting their songs. One way was to have their songs used as themes song for television programs or movies.

The other was having a song appear as a commercial image song. While image songs had existed since around 1961, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a few songs that were originally written for commercials became hits, most notably Coca-Cola's "I Feel Coke." The record companies quickly

⁶² Schilling 96.

⁶³ Schilling 95-96.

Coca-Cola's "I Feel Coke." The record companies quickly realized that including a song in a commercial would be a great way of promoting a song. One of the first was "*Kimi wa Nani o Oshite kureta* [You Teach Me Everything]" used in a 1971 Glico Almond Choco ad.⁶⁴ When that song became a hit, other advertisers and record companies soon made similar deals, and by the mid-1970s, including a song in a commercial became a major means of promotion. The relationship became symbiotic; the mood of the song would support the selling of the good, and the song and artist would be played several hundred times a day, even if only a 15 to 30 second clip- far more times possible than through radio airplay or appearances on music programs. Record companies soon discovered that songs used in commercials, initially with their idol singers, tended to sell better.⁶⁵ In turn, if an advertiser wanted to launch a new product, they would seek the music and/or the appearance of a popular performer, such as the case with Pink Lady ice cream or the use of idol Go Hiromi to introduce Japan National Railway's "Exotic Japan" campaign in 1984, discussed below.⁶⁶ Both of these methods became known as "tie-ups."⁶⁷ It was both of these means that Pink Lady and many idols of the 1980s would successfully exploit.

⁶⁴ *Ezaki Glico Shashi* [Glico Corporate History] n.d.
<http://www.glico.co.jp/corp/hstry5.htm> [02 Mar 2000].

⁶⁵ One of the results of this practice is that song and artist are usually credited in small type at the bottom of the screen to help recognizability and sales. This remained true even when Western artists began to have their music used in Japanese commercials in the 1980s and a sharp contrast to songs remaining uncredited, even if current, in American commercials.

⁶⁶ Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of The Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: U of Chicago P 1995) 48.

⁶⁷ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 149; Kimura 318-19.

many idols of the 1980s would successfully exploit.

While the duo continued to score hits in Japan such as "Southpaw," which included a pitching motion in the choreography, and "UFO," a favorite among grade school kids, Victor decided to try exposing Pink Lady to the United States market. In April 1978, Pink Lady played their first American gig at the Tropicana in Las Vegas, mostly covering American pop songs, such as Nillson's "Without You" and "House of The Rising Sun." In December 1978, they recorded their first English single, "Love Countdown."⁶⁸

But, things for Pink Lady started to turn sour at about that same time. The duo turned down an invitation to appear on the *Kohaku Uta Gassen* in favor of appearing on a New Year's Eve program of their own on NTV. The show, called *Pink Lady Ase to Namida no Omisoka 150 fun* [Pink Lady's 150 Minutes of Sweat and Tears on New Year's Eve], was trounced in the ratings, getting only 8.2% compared to *Kohaku's* 72.2%.⁶⁹

With the beginning of 1979, the popularity of Pink Lady in Japan began to wane, just as interest in the United States started to peak. The first single of 1979, "Jipangu" peaked at number four, ending the string of number ones. The next single "Pink Typhoon" only reached number six, but still sold a respectable 290,000 copies. American disco group The Village People later did an English language cover of the song. Bringing in the Beach Boys to sing backup on their July 1979 single "Namanori Pirates [Surfriding Pirates]" only

⁶⁸ Schilling 188.

⁶⁹ Schilling 188-89.

July 1979 single "*Namanori* Pirates [Surfriding Pirates]" only boosted the single to number four. While they were still putting singles into the top ten, Pink Lady was very clearly past their peak.⁷⁰

However, Pink Lady's fortunes overseas looked a little better. The Sid and Marty Krofft produced show *Pink Lady and Jeff* debuted as a summer replacement show in 1979 on NBC, with the showing garnering ratings as high as 32%. Their first international single "A Kiss In The Dark" peaked at 37 on the United States Billboard charts, an event that no other Japanese act besides Sakamoto Kyû's "Sukiyaki" in 1963 has achieved before or since. They even released a full length album on Curb/Elektra, titled simply *Pink Lady*. However, the show, consisting mostly of Mii and Kei speaking cutely in their broken English and variety patter, was gone by the fall and the duo never released another record in the United States.⁷¹ *Pink Lady and Jeff*, along with other shows like *Supertrain* are considered part of the darkest days for NBC and are now a cultural reference point to make fun of.⁷²

Back in Japan, Pink Lady, facing poor record sales, struggled throughout 1980 and finally gave a farewell stadium concert and disbanded in March 1981. As their lyricist reportedly told the president of their talent agency, T&S,

⁷⁰ Schilling 189.

⁷¹ Grace Lee and Jeff Yang "Japanese Girl Bands" *EST* 263; Schilling 189.

⁷² For example, the numerous references made to Pink Lady during bad Japanese monster flicks, like *Gamera vs. Zigra* ("Pink Lady at home" – Tom Servo), on the satirical program *Mystery Science Theater 3000* or in comic books ["Goldenhead!" "You were expecting maybe Pink Lady and Jeff?" – Sean Carolan and Jennifer Moore, "Hello Nurse, Agent of H.U.B.B.A." *Animaniacs* 23 (March 1997) 4.] It is interesting that Pink Lady are more remembered in the United States as not singers, but as TV stars.

reportedly told the president of their talent agency, T&S, "They should have disbanded a year earlier."⁷³

In stark contrast to the rise and fall of Pink Lady, more sound oriented bands seemed able to build a longer lasting fan base. The popularity of the New Musicians created an environment where television was no longer the primary means for promotion and more musically adventurous styles became accepted. Thus, artists and bands, while not strictly under the New Music definition, but were more concerned with how they sounded rather than what they looked like, also became popular. While they may not have had a strong impact on the singles chart, their albums sold well and their popularity was not of the moment like Pink Lady, and indeed of many of idol singers, but one that held steady over time. In one case, this popularity even extended internationally. Two bands that best typify this during the late 1970s and into the 1980s are Southern All Stars and Yellow Magic Orchestra.

In 1978, Southern All Stars released their first single "*Kitte Ni Sinbad* [Sinbad In Your Own Way]," spoofing two recent singles- Pink Lady's "*Nagisa no Sinbad* [Sinbad On The Beach]" and Sawada Kenji's "*Kitte Ni Shiyagare* [Do What You Want]." While the song combined English and Japanese lyrics, a common practice in most of Japanese pop songs since the late 1960s, the lead singer Kuwata Keisuke sang the Japanese lyrics, even nonsensical lyrics, as if they were in English, something no one else was doing at the time. He achieved this by singing Japanese words as if they were similar

⁷³ Schilling 189.

this by singing Japanese words as if they were similar sounding English words, rather than sing phrases in 5 or 7 syllable pieces, as was common with most singing in Japanese. This made his singing fit the melody, rather than having the melody try to accommodate the singing. The group's songs, centering around romantic good times at Shonan Beach, a popular surf and swim beach near Kamakura, further boosted the group's popularity.⁷⁴

Southern All Stars started out as a music club at Aoyama Gakuin University. The group began to play professionally around 1975. While they were considered part of the New Music movement, they did not totally shun television appearances, as did Arai Yumi and others. Instead, they appeared on television on their own terms. Southern All Stars debuted on the program *The Best Ten*, which was broadcast from a Tokyo club, rather than from a studio and they dressed in tanktops and shorts, rather than the neat suits favored by the idol and *kayôkyoku* singers.⁷⁵

However, like most other New Musicians, it was not their image that was most important, but their sound. While lyrically Southern All Stars throughout the late 1970s and into the mid 1980s focused on the summer good times at the beach theme, their surf-rock influenced sound coupled with Kuwata's singing was the main focus. When the band released "*Itoshii no Ellie* [Ellie, My Love]" in 1979, the single's popularity solidified the bands' status as pop stars. A soulful ballad used as a TV drama theme, it sold over 710,000

⁷⁴ Schilling 109; Ogawa 67.

⁷⁵ Schilling 109-10; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 40.

soulful ballad used as a TV drama theme, it sold over 710,000 copies. The song was even covered by Ray Charles in English in 1989. As the band entered the 1980s, they began a string of ten number one albums and were the biggest selling rock band of the early 1980s.⁷⁶

By 1985, however, Kuwata began to grow tired of being known only as a band that played summer songs. Southern All Stars broke up that year and Kuwata formed another band. Kuwata also sang with the US duo Hall and Oates on their 1987 album *Big Bam Boom*. In 1989, Southern All Stars re-formed to record their 26th single and first number one, "Sayonara Baby." Throughout the 1990s, Southern All Stars continued to have top selling singles and albums, including 1993's "Erotica Seven," which sold 1,727,000 copies, their biggest hit ever. Meanwhile, they expanded their lyrics to include topics ranging from money politics and AIDS to troubles of living in the city.⁷⁷

Southern All Stars exemplifies one of the trends of the 1970s. After the break in popularity between the *kayôkyoku* singers and New Musicians around 1970, several artists had long careers that spanned several decades and remained influential. Yumi Arai for example, who renamed herself Yuming in the early 1980s, continued to record into the mid 1990s. This is in sharp contrast to the majority of idol singers whose popularity might be limited to a year or two—if they were lucky. Another band whose members had a long career, both in and out of the group, and became highly

⁷⁶ Ogawa 67; Schilling 110.

⁷⁷ Southern All Stars, *Young Love*, Speedstar/Victor (Japan) VICL-777, 1996; Schilling 110-11.

career, both in and out of the group, and became highly influential was Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO). However, what set YMO apart was that their influence extended beyond Japan and into international circles. It was the emergence of YMO that made people worldwide notice Japanese popular music for the first time.

Yellow Magic Orchestra was formed in 1978 and released their first album on Alfa that same year. Hosono Haruomi, who had been in the New Rock bands Apryl Fool and Happy End and recorded Polynesian influenced pop under the name "Harry" Hosono in the mid 1970s, invited Takahashi Yukihiro and Ryûichi Sakamoto to play on his 1978 album *Paradiso*. Takahashi was an experienced drummer with many folk and rock bands, most notably Sadistic Mika Band. Sakamoto had graduated with a Masters of Fine Arts in composition from Tokyo University of Arts, where he studied John Coltrane, John Cage, and Claude Debussy. He was also heavily in demand as a session musician, playing primarily piano and synthesizer, since his graduation in 1974. Both Takahashi and Sakamoto released solo records before joining Hosono.⁷⁸

On *Paradiso*, Hosono, Takahashi and Sakamoto decided to produce music that would sound "Oriental" to both Western and Japanese listeners, and dubbed themselves "Yellow Magic Band," after a Captain Beefheart song of the same name. The three later decided to make the band more permanent by changing the name to Yellow Magic Orchestra and returning to the studio. While the songs on *Paradiso* used synthesizers as

⁷⁸ Brain Currid, "'Finally, I Reach To Africa': Ryûichi Sakamoto and Sounding Japan(ese)" *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture* 72-73; Schilling 300, 302; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 115.

the studio. While the songs on *Paradiso* used synthesizers as part of the overall sound, the trio became inspired by the emerging work of Tangerine Dream, Kraftwerk and Giorgio Moroder, and their 1978 self titled debut was based largely on the synthesizer sound, with singsong melodies and dancable hooks.⁷⁹

The band's detached playing style and singing, done by Chris Mosdell, who also wrote the lyrics for the early songs, caught the attention of those in the West. The band's sound was similar to Kraftwerk and some of the more techno based New Wave artists, such as Gary Numan and Joy Division. For example, on the band's second album *Solid State Survivor* from 1979, the first side consisted of mostly instrumental tracks while the second side featured Mosdell singing, including an oddly restrained version of The Beatles classic "Daytripper." The album leads off with "Technopolis", with a computer altered voice saying "Tokyo," and in many ways this was symbolic of both how the band and others that would soon follow were perceived; technical wizzes from a technology rich country. Overall, the album compares favorably to Kraftwerk's 1980 album *Computerworld*, and may even be a little more free in its dance hooks and more organic sound, using regular drums and bass as opposed to drum machines on the Kraftwerk album.⁸⁰

This synergy attracted the American label A&M to release their first album worldwide in the spring of 1979. In the fall of that year, Yellow Magic Orchestra embarked on a

⁷⁹ Schilling 300-02

⁸⁰ Yellow Magic Orchestra, *Solid State Survivor*, Alfa (Japan) 32AX-139 1979 (198? CD reissue); Schilling, 300-01.

fall of that year, Yellow Magic Orchestra embarked on a worldwide tour, playing throughout Europe and North America. The single "Computer Game" from the first album was released in 1980 and peaked at 60 on the US charts and 17 on the British charts, perhaps reflective of the general acceptance of synthesizer based music in Europe. Overall, the 1979-1980 tour attracted over 100,000 fans and the album was sold in 33 countries.⁸¹

However, even though they were enjoying success both within Japan and internationally, the various members of YMO worked on other projects outside of the group. In 1980, Sakamoto released his second solo record *B-2 Unit*, an album Brian Currid describes as evoking "alternatively dystopic and utopic visions of global modernity and simultaneity..."⁸² In a way, *B-2 Unit* served as a further exploration of the themes of *Solid State Survivor*— of man living in a technological landscape and the resultant anxieties ("Technopolis", "Behind The Mask", "Insomnia", "Solid State Survivor"). Takahashi continued work as a fashion designer. Hosono set up Non-Standard records and began producing other artists. Finally after 11 albums, Yellow Magic Orchestra played a farewell concert at the Budokan in December 1983 and broke up.⁸³

After Yellow Magic Orchestra broke up, and even before, Ryûichi Sakamoto had the most international exposure of the three, even though all three continued to be involved in the music business. In 1983, Sakamoto appeared with David Bowie in *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* and wrote the soundtrack for

⁸¹ Mitsui, "Introduction" 262 note 2; Schilling 301.

⁸² Currid 77.

⁸³ Schilling 303.

in *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* and wrote the soundtrack for the film. The soundtrack came out both in a film version and a piano version called *Coda*. Throughout the 1980s, Sakamoto continued to write film soundtracks, including the 1987 Oscar award winning *The Last Emperor*. He also worked with numerous international musicians such as David Byrne (of Talking Heads), Brian Eno, Thomas Dolby, David Sylvan (of the group Japan) and Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour, as well as producing other artists in Japan.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, Hosono Harumi continued to produce records and run his label. By the 1990s, Hosono had become one of the primary exponents of ambient music, a style of music that is synthesizer based, but is usually of a slower tempo and makes use of found sounds, producing three albums in the mid 1990s.⁸⁵

In 1993, YMO reformed, this time under the name Not YMO (YMO with a cross through it), since Toshiba-EMI, Alfa's parent company, owned the rights to the name Yellow Magic Orchestra. There was world tour and an album was released, *Technodon*. However, since the three musicians had gone in different directions musically in the interim, the music was different from the original, and instead was more atmospheric and ambient sounding.⁸⁶ Sakamoto characterized the *Technodon* sessions as "three novelists in a room trying to write one novel."⁸⁷ After a final show at Tokyo Dome, the group once again broke up.

⁸⁴ Currid 73; Schilling 303-04; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 118-19; See Currid for a more detailed examination of Sakamoto's solo work and some issues it raises.

⁸⁵ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 115.

⁸⁶ Schilling 304.

⁸⁷ Schilling 118-19.

again broke up.

The final major event of the late 1970s was the mainstreaming of Okinawan and other Japanese ethnic groups' music. Okinawan music and culture has long been viewed as a mixture of Japanese and pan-Asiatic influences. As a minority on a distant island, the Okinawan culture had long been ignored in Japan in favor of maintaining the fiction of the homogeneity of Japanese culture. However, in an atmosphere of self-rediscovery and self-exoticization that started to form in the late 1970s, this led to the ability of minorities, such as Okinawans, Ainu and Japanese Koreans, to reassert themselves through numerous cultural activities, including adapting popular music. These activities found favor among the public, in part because of the widening range of musical styles being performed by the New Musicians. This experimentation took a wide range of forms such as groups performing pop songs in the Ainu language, Shang Shang Typhoon, which used Japanese, Okinawan and Chinese folk songs as well as rock and blues as inspiration, and Tokyo Bibimbap Club, who combined Korean and Western instrumentation to play reggae.⁸⁸ Japanese artists, in turn, looked towards Okinawan and other Japanese folk musics for inspiration. Ryûichi Sakamoto, for example, often used the sanshin, an Okinawan stringed instrument similar to a shamisen and juxtaposed Okinawan singers with Youssou N'Dour on his 1990 album *Beauty*.⁸⁹ One of the groups responsible for this popularization is Champloose.

⁸⁸ McClure *Nippon Pop* 50,58.

⁸⁹ Currid 94; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 47.

popularization is Champloose.

Champloose, led by Kina Shoukichi, was one of the first groups to combine the sanshin with electric instruments. They had their first big hit "*Hassai Ojisan*" in 1974. However, it was the ballad "*Subete no Hito no Kokoro ni Hana wo* [Flowers for Someone I Love]" from their 1980 album *Bloodline* that solidified their popularity. The song has gone on to be covered by many other performers. Kina and Champloose were inactive for most of the 1980s, but returned in 1990. In 1991, Champloose recorded *Earth Spirit*, an album that fused Okinakan music with the work of French and Northern African zouk musicians.⁹⁰

Champloose and the start of the mainstreaming of musics by other ethnic groups in Japan appeared at a time of Japanese self rediscovery (even if government mediated) and exoticization began to emerge, because of financial self-doubt and rapid industrialization. Marilyn Ivy discusses in detail about the Japanese National Railway ad campaign of the 1970s entitled "Discover Japan," and as she notes the phrase "summed up the longings of an entire decade[.]"⁹¹ The goal of the advertisements was to reinforce and commodify the notion of traveling to an "authentic" Japan- locations laying outside of the urbanized and Westernized population centers- as a means of self discovery. This sort of return could also be seen in music. During the economic recovery of the 1950s and 1960s, Western music idioms like rock and country were exciting precisely because they were foreign; a break from

⁹⁰ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 47.

⁹¹ Ivy 34.

exciting precisely because they were foreign; a break from the past and innovative in keeping with the spirit of the times. However, by the 1970s, much like the more internal musings of the New Musicians writ large, some Japanese musicians began to look to Japanese folk musics for inspiration. The music they produced was certainly mediated by rock music, but at the same time it was an attempt at finding the "authentic." Rather than something to be looked down upon, as was the case during the rush to industrialization⁹², Japanese folk music became attractive precisely because of its remoteness and exotic quality. Thus, integration into mainstream music of the revival of Japanese folk music in the late 1970s and the emergence of Okinawan pop can be seen in this light.

The music and the travel advertisements were symptomatic of the contradictory trends of the late 1970s. On the one hand, Japanese were becoming increasingly self-conscious about who they were; a sense that Japan was not Asian and not Western. Thus, Yellow Magic Orchestra's goal of making music that was "Oriental to Western ears and Western to Oriental ears." On the other hand, more Japanese had the financial means to buy items from around the world. With increased disposable income, especially among young women, the three prized items became *juueru*, *jetto* and *juutaku* (jewels, jetting [travel] and a house).⁹³ This travel was often to places like Hawaii, Europe and America, bringing many young people in direct contact with the foreign for the

⁹² Mitsui 284.

⁹³ Kelly 79.

many young people in direct contact with the foreign for the first time in large numbers. This contact reinforced the notion that Japan was simultaneously similar to but different from Europe and America. This sparked a desire to retain an identity that was both Asian and Western— yet still Japanese. The “Discover Japan” campaign was to highlight the traditional as the essence of Japan and this feeling was also reflected in reintroduction of traditional musical idioms into Japanese popular music.⁹⁴

It should also be noted that the appearance of groups like Champloose, as well as new age artist Kitarô’s Silk Road cycle, in the late 1970s anticipated the appearance of JNR’s 1984 ad campaign “Exotic Japan,” where Japan is exoticized and Japan’s ties to continental Asia was emphasized, with references to continental Buddhism, Chinese-derived festivals in Nagasaki and the Persian floats of Kyoto’s Gion Matsuri.⁹⁵

Another aspect of this self-exoticization was the appearance of the *zoku* or tribes in Yoyogi Park in Tokyo and other urban areas. Various *zoku* had appeared in Japanese popular culture throughout 20th century, such as the *Taiyôzoku* or “Sun Tribe” of the 1960s. However, with the *Bôsôzoku* or “Wild Drivers Tribe” and *Takenokozoku* or “Bamboo Shoots Tribe” that appeared around 1980 there was an important difference. These two “tribes” used popular music as part of their identity. Rather than a secondary characteristic, as was the case with folk music and the *Taiyôzoku*, the type of music that *Takenokozoku* and *Bôsôzoku*

⁹⁴ Ivy 47.

⁹⁵ Ivy 48-49.

Taiyôzoku, the type of music that *Takenokozoku* and *Bôsôzoku* listened to was a primary means of defining attachment to the group.⁹⁶ The *zoku* also represent the transformation of youth in Japan was complete "with its own interests, culture, heroes and battles. While nominally it is portrayed as revolt, it produces socialization and group uniformity."⁹⁷

Soon after the so called "Pedestrian Paradise" began, where the streets in major shopping areas were closed on Sunday in Tokyo in the spring of 1980, the streets of Harajuku and adjacent Yoyogi Park became filled with people dressed up dancing to music. The larger of the two groups was the *Bôsôzoku*. Sometimes referred to the "American Graffiti Tribe" and sharing their name with a similarly clad motorcycle gang, the *Bôsôzoku* favored 1950s fashions and music. They danced to the music of Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis and early Elvis Presley while initially wearing shiny black pants or jeans, pointed shoes, leather jackets and pompadours for the guys and pastel cardigans, pleated poodle skirts, saddle shoes and hair bows for the girls. While the music stayed the same, over time both male and female members adopted the jeans and leather jacket look. The *Takenokozoku*, which took its name from a Harajuku shop, danced to Yellow Magic Orchestra while wearing colorful flowing unisex robes, pantaloons and kabuki inspired makeup.⁹⁸

However, the method to the dancing was remarkably similar. The dance routines were meticulously rehearsed in

⁹⁶ C. Scott Littleton, "Tokyo Rock and Role" *Natural History* August 1985: 49-50.

⁹⁷ Attali 109-110.

⁹⁸ Littleton 49-50.

similar. The dance routines were meticulously rehearsed in advance of the Sunday performance and were often performed in circles or lines in the manner of Japanese folk dances. Furthermore, devotion and loyalty to the group was demanded from its members. Status of the various members was determined by how long they had been in the group and their relative ages, with deference going to the more senior members. In this way, stereotyped notions of Japanese group dynamics were still in play despite their outcast image.⁹⁹

In a sense, both groups reflect the youth, who Littleton notes are mostly middle class with aspirations to get into college, during a wave of nostalgia and longing for a seemingly simpler time. Unlike the 1950s nostalgia that swept the United States in the 1970s, which was a looking backwards on its own history, the *Bôsôzoku* and the greaser inspired bands like Carol and Hound Dog, both popular during the late 1970s and early 1980s, could be seen as a more generic nostalgia, a longing for an era that, for Japan, never really existed. As noted in Chapter Two, it was only the relatively well to do who could afford to listen and collect rock and roll records in the 1950s. This sort of nostalgia, not for a specific time, but rather for a more general notion of what that past should have been, can be seen in other places, such as the popularity of Mickey Mouse among young women.¹⁰⁰ The *Bôsôzoku* also helped fulfill the seemingly contradictory goals of exocitizing oneself from the rest of society and finding themselves their own group

⁹⁹ Littleton 51-52.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Yoko Brannen "'Bwana Mickey': Constructing Cultural Consumption At Tokyo Disneyland" *Re-Made In Japan* 223-225; Littleton 51.

rest of society and finding themselves their own group identity. The aggressive posturing of the group and their clothing placed the *Bôsôzoku* "beyond the pale" of respectability as far as many Japanese were concerned, at the same time the members of the group were trying to find something to distinguish themselves- in a sense, finding their own place in society.

The *Takenokozoku* are another example of self-exoticization and pastiche that was becoming a major part of Japanese society. As was the case with elements of Okinawan and Japanese folk music being incorporated into pop music, elements from different sources were being used in unusual combinations in a wide range of media. Littleton describes the costumes and dancing of the group as a "generalized Asian fantasy,"¹⁰¹ drawing from Japanese, Korean and Chinese influences as well as Western ones. The *Takenokozoku* took the YMO's ideal of "Oriental sounding to Westerns and Western sounding to Asians" and gave it a physical appearance- the juxtaposition of ultramodern synthesizer music with quasi-traditional dancing and costumes. The result was something that was neither Western nor Asian, but something totally different. This signaled not a nostalgia, even for a mythical age, but a postmodernist desire to throw together disparate elements and create a slurry of culture.

Moreover, it was symptomatic of a trend in Japanese culture. Tastes were becoming atomized- based not only on age, but also on difference within the same age group. Because of increased access to a wider variety of goods,

¹⁰¹ Littleton 50.

Because of increased access to a wider variety of goods, because of both economic and technological factors, people increasingly became defined by the Westernized goods that they consumed- clothes, music, foods, etc. With this greater variety available, there was an effort to present a unified identity, based largely on the odd position that Japan was located in the global system; simultaneously Western and not Western, Asian and not Asian. But by that very position, people could draw upon a wide variety of sources, such as Yellow Magic Orchestra and kabuki, find resonance, and place them together in new and interesting combinations- a trend that would become more pronounced in the late 1980s and into the 1990s. Japan, having become fully part of the global system could willfully pick and choose elements from anywhere and throw them together.¹⁰²

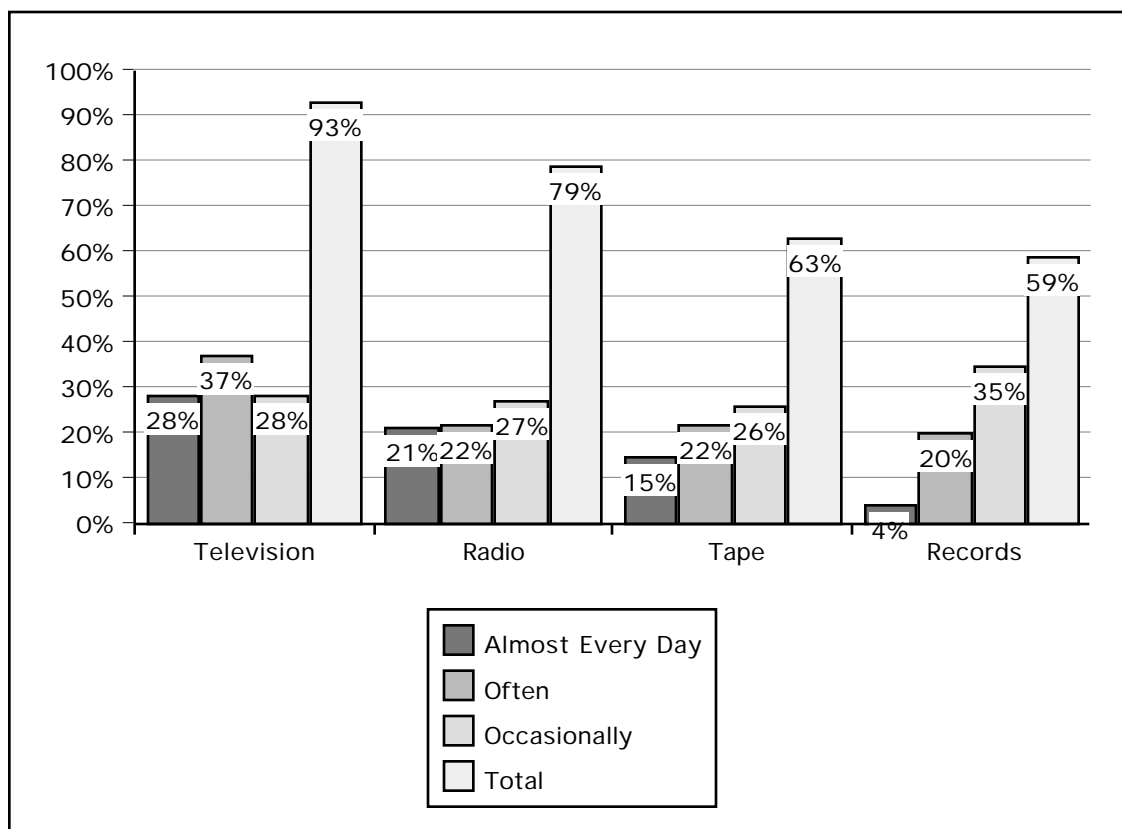
The popularity of the *Takenokozoku* paralleled the popularity of Yellow Magic Orchestra, dying out in the mid-1980s. The *Bôsôzoku* remained, however, in Yoyogi Park into the mid-1990s, though their space was increasingly dominated by all manner of amateur bands starting in the late 1980s. The nature of the *Bôsôzoku*, moreover, had changed. Rather than the purely symbolic posturing and confrontations that Littleton describes in his 1985 article¹⁰³, the Yoyogi dancers and the motorcycle gangs had seemed to merge, becoming more violent. I observed a pair of *Bôsôzoku* get into a fight, seemingly over territory, during a trip to Yoyogi in 1995. There also seemed to be a greater number of men and women in

¹⁰² Ivy 55-57; Kitagawa 315.

¹⁰³ Littleton 52.

There also seemed to be a greater number of men and women in leather jackets and jeans during that 1995 visit than the Buddy Holly suits and jackets and poodle skirts that Littleton describes. That they continued to exist, though, was a testament to the persistence of nostalgia.

The changes that happened around 1980 would set the stage for the rest of the decade, just as 1970 marked an important turning point in history of Japanese popular music. At that point, the market was dominated mostly by New Musicians and idol singers. But those broad categories encompassed an ever widening palette of styles; from the ballads of Arai Yumi and many of the idol singers to the rock of Hound Dog and Southern All Stars to the disco informed music of Pink Lady and Circus to the Okinawan pop of Champloose. Those styles could even be broken down further—Arai Yumi piano based songs exploring the inner self as opposed to the more conventional love songs of the idol singers; Hound Dog and Carol, who looked to towards rockabilly and doo-wop for inspiration contrasted with Southern All Stars' good time guitar based rock. In addition, with the popularity of Yellow Magic Orchestra, other synthesizer based groups started to appear, such as The Plastics. But as Pink Lady proved, those acts that could present themselves well on television sold the best.



from Herd, 76.

FIGURE 1: 1982 NHK Survey: Type of media preferred for listening to music

As figure 1 illustrates, television still remained the primary source for music for most people in Japan. As a result, the music industry continued to have a very heavy visual component. While New Music and rock acts continued to sell, idols such Matsuda Seiko and Onyanko Club began to dominate the single charts. In the same NHK survey, it was revealed that 66% of people favored *kayôkyoku*, which included idol, New Music and folk music. Interestingly, 51% said they favored *enka* as well, despite its sales being only a fraction of what they were, and 21% stating they liked current pop

hits.¹⁰⁴

There was also a change in how people began to relate to these idols. People tended to react to idols in one of two ways in the 1970s- either in totally uncritical enthusiasm or with intellectual disdain for its overt commercialism. Often those of this latter group would be fans of New Music, jazz or classical music. However, right around 1980, high school and university clubs began to form around idol singers. While these groups, often composed of young men, were enthusiastic about the idols and would follow the idols' every move in the media, they would also evaluate and analyze these moves with an objective coolness.¹⁰⁵

Another change in how people related to music was the appearance of record rental shops. The first of these appeared in June 1980, started by a enterprising university student. Rental prices started at ¥50 for a single and ¥200-250 for an LP. By 1982, the Japan Phonograph Record Association counted over one thousand outlets and 97.4% of customers copied the rented records. Record stores near record rental shops saw sales decrease 30 to 50%.¹⁰⁶ Record sales had slowly increased in the late 1970s, hovering around ¥200 billion a year, peaking to almost ¥300 billion in 1981. After 1980, however, revenues started to drop and did not begin to rise again until 1986, when CD sales began to take up some of the slack.¹⁰⁷

There are three reasons for the popularity of the rental

¹⁰⁴ Herd 77.

¹⁰⁵ Kitagawa 308-10.

¹⁰⁶ Kawabata 345 note 4.

¹⁰⁷ Kawabata 327, 329.

There are three reasons for the popularity of the rental shops. First of all, cassette tape recorders had become more common in Japanese households, especially with the introduction of the Walkman in 1979. Secondly, records and prerecorded tapes were relatively expensive compared to other countries. Even though more people could afford to buy a new LP, which ran from ¥2500 to ¥3000¹⁰⁸, in 1980 than in 1960, issues such as size and expense limited most people from buying LPs in great numbers. Lastly, most of the record stores in Japan at that time were small and locally owned, with few larger chains. These stores tended only to stock the most popular titles due to limited space. Rental stores, since they needed to carry only one or two copies of a particular title, could carry a larger selection. They also allowed people to listen to an album first and then decide if they wanted to copy it or only a particular song or two. The practice of making compilations of favorite songs from rented or from their own discs became known as "My Tape." By making these compilation tapes, people were no longer simply listening to music, but like the music clubs, were active in shaping in how the music was consumed.¹⁰⁹

By the late 1980s, record rental had become a ¥30 billion a year industry. Record rental stores bought

¹⁰⁸ One of the curiosities of Japanese record retailing is that first LPs and then later CDs have remained at the same price, ¥2500 to ¥3000, since the late 1950s. This is starting to breakdown with the presence of large international record retailers such as Tower and HMV, but it still remains true that often times import CDs into Japan are less expensive than the domestic version. To help boost the sales of foreign artists' Japanese releases, record labels will often include extras, such as bonus tracks (usually songs that appear as B-sides of singles in Europe or America) or lyric sheets.

¹⁰⁹ Kitagawa 310.

billion a year industry. Record rental stores bought approximately 270,000 records a month by this time. A JPRA report in 1985 estimated that each record was rented 15.4 times, leading to an estimated loss of 3.88 million record sales a year. By June 1990, there was approximately 6000 record rental outlets, close to the 7000 record retail outlets.¹¹⁰

The impact on record sales because of record rentals is difficult to gauge, but its sheer size would indicate that the number of people listening to popular music was enormous. It also underscores the role that technology— particularly the portable tape recorder and compact discs— had in expanding that market. For example, a 1990 survey discovered that 63.8% of females aged 10-15 owned a tape recorder.¹¹¹ Access and affordability to this technology was key to the expansion of the market in the 1980s.

Surrounding the new leisure activities and aided by new technologies that made their distribution easier, new types of association began to develop, as pointed to by the clubs and circles surrounding anime, manga, and idol singers. Rather than relationships based on place, other factors, such as common interests, ranging from activities like skiing and tennis to anime and popular music were bringing people together. Numerous bands started out as music clubs in high school and college, and several manga artists got their start in manga clubs, publishing their own stories.

These music clubs were formed in response to the

¹¹⁰ Kawabata 329, 342, 345 note 5.

¹¹¹ Kitagawa 310.

These music clubs were formed in response to the enormous popularity of idols like Matsuda Seiko, whose popularity and longevity is both illustrative and extraordinary. Also called Seiko-chan or *mama-idoru*, due to her longevity, she has had 15 number one albums and 25 number one singles, 24 of those in a row. Sometimes she is compared with Madonna, since both have demonstrated the unusual ability to reinvent their identity in response to changing times and to weather scandals.¹¹²

Born Kamachi Noriko in Fukuoka, Matsuda Seiko became interested in singing after watching Pink Lady. In 1979, at the age of 17, she entered a CBS-Sony sponsored talent contest called "Miss Seventeen Love Idol Attack" and won over 4500 other contestants. After her father refused to let her go, she was encouraged by a CBS-Sony music director, and traveled to Tokyo on her own. There, she auditioned for the Sun music agency.¹¹³

In April 1980, Matsuda released her first single "*Hadashi no Kisatsu* [Barefoot Season]." Soon after she released her first album *Squall*. The single had a promotional budget of ¥70 million, ¥30 million of which came from Sun, an unusually large amount for an unknown, but Sun insisted it was necessary for her to stand out from the 600 other new artists.¹¹⁴

Her debut single was nothing extraordinary, but it was a good example of idol singers of the period. Matsuda's voice

¹¹² Schilling 114; Yang and Ko 265.

¹¹³ Schilling 115-16.

¹¹⁴ 1978-1980 *CD Sensho Best*, SRCL 3466, Sony Entertainment (Japan), 1996; Schilling, 116.

good example of idol singers of the period. Matsuda's voice was good, perhaps even adequate for the song, but she showed a definite limitation in her range. She did, however, put her all into the song and gave the song a bright cheeriness, well matched with the light pop of the melody and disco inspired string arrangement and beat of the song. In short, it definitely places the song at 1980, making it feel a bit dated. The song managed to sell 288,000 copies, partially on its strength on being used in a Shiseido cosmetics commercial. The next two singles, "*Aoi Sangosho* [Blue Coral Reef]," released in July 1980, and "*Kaze wa Shushoku* [The Wind Is The Color of Fall]," released in October 1980, sold even better. "*Aoi*" was used in a Glico commercial, and sold 602,000 copies, peaking at number two. "*Kaze*" was also used in another Shiseido commercial and became the first of Matsuda's 24 straight number one singles, selling 796,000 copies. In her first year alone, her sales totaled over ¥8 billion, more than making up the initial ¥70 million advertising budget.¹¹⁵

Between 1980 and 1985, Matsuda released a new single every three to four months, and with only a few exceptions all were used in a commercial or movies. In 1983, her album *Utopia* sold over 900,000 units, her best selling album ever.¹¹⁶ However, it wasn't just the sheer amount of material that she put out and her constant exposure through television and movies that accounted for her popularity. It was the image that she projected in the early 1980s that held its greatest

¹¹⁵ 1978-1980 *CD Sensho Best*; Schilling 116; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 19; Ogawa 151.

¹¹⁶ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 19; Ogawa 150-51.

that she projected in the early 1980s that held its greatest appeal.

Matsuda is flat chested and bowlegged, and in television appearances and advertisements, she would wear children's clothing, take faltering steps and blush, cry and giggle on camera. To further this childish image, several books were published filled with Matsuda's large wobbly handwriting, small words and simple poetry. Matsuda was able to capitalize on and exemplify the fashion of being cute, infantile, and harmless (in short, *kawaii*) that was becoming popular at about that time, a trend that got thrust to the forefront by the popularity of idols like Pink Lady in the late 1970s.¹¹⁷

In the wake of this popularity, other idols came out that emphasized this *kawaii* quality, mainly between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. Male singing groups like Tanokin Trio, aged fourteen to nineteen at their debut in 1980 and female idol Kyon Kyon, aged fourteen at her debut in 1982 are typical. At the extreme of this trend is the Onyanko Club (Kitten Club). Starting out as a group of 24 utterly average high school girls from the Fuji TV show *Yûyake Nyan Nyan* [Sunset Kittens] that started in 1985, in July of that year they started to release singles. The group, which eventually expanded to 52 girls all together, was popular because its members would act childish, frivolous, and totally guileless. Some of the individual girls went on to careers of their own. However, there was no criticism of the obvious commercialism

¹¹⁷ Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties In Japan" *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan* eds. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1995) 222, 234-35.

However, there was no criticism of the obvious commercialism that these girls represented.¹¹⁸

In 1988, already an incredible span of time for an idol, Matsuda's string of number one singles came to an end. That year, despite some personal controversy, she decided to tackle the United States market, just as Pink Lady had done 10 years before. Sony, which had just purchased Columbia Records outright, advised her that if she was to make it in the United States, she would have to drop the *burikko* (a girlish woman) act, since that didn't sell in the United States. Matsuda took singing, dancing and English lessons and attempted to reinvent herself. In June 1990, she released her US debut, under the name *Seiko* and the single "The Right Combination" with New Kids On The Block singer and label mate Donnie Wahlberg. While Matsuda sang reasonably well in English and Wahlberg's presence garnered some interest and radio airplay, the song was an average soft pop song; that is to say, there was nothing really to distinguish the song. Furthermore, while Matsuda tried to shed most of the *burikko* image, it still lingered in her soft, fluffy singing style. Contrast this to Madonna's image at the time of being very forceful and strong in both singing and presentation. Thus, despite a massive campaign in magazines like *Billboard* to push the song and album, both barely charted and strained Matsuda's relations with Sony.¹¹⁹

Matsuda wanted to try again to break the US market, but because of the failures of Matsuda and a few other acts they

¹¹⁸ Kinsella 235-36; Kitagawa 308-10; Schilling 168-69.

¹¹⁹ Schilling 119-20.

because of the failures of Matsuda and a few other acts they tried to push, Sony was no longer willing. Meanwhile, Matsuda's Japanese sales continued to decrease, her final Sony album *It's Style '95* selling a mere 260,000 copies. In July 1995, she left Sony and signed with Mercury International. In October, she returned to the United States for another try, this time sporting a more soul/R&B influenced sound. In February 1996, she became the first Japanese artist to grace the cover of *Billboard* and in May of that year released her second English language album *It's The Future* and the single "Let's Talk About It." A&M, her US record company, also owned by Mercury's parent, Polygram, took out full page ads promoting the single and a thousand radio stations added it to their play lists. But once again, both album and single failed to chart. Meanwhile, in Japan her new single "Anata ni Aitai Kite- Missing You [I Want to See You- Missing You]" went number one in its first week, her first number one in eight years and was her first million seller. The album *Vanity Fair* was also a hit in Japan. So despite a resurgence of popularity in Japan and a summer tour, her failure to crack the US charts represented another setback.¹²⁰

While the idols dominated the Japanese single charts and the New Musicians continued to sell well, a small group of artists were picking up on both the influence of Yellow Magic Orchestra and the international punk/new wave movement. These groups managed to garner some attention in both Japan and internationally, usually at this point in Europe. Two of

¹²⁰ Schilling 122; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 19.

and internationally, usually at this point in Europe. Two of these groups that had a long lasting impact were Sandii and The Sunsetz and The Plastics.

The Sunsetz started out in 1973 as Makoto Kubota & The Sunset Gang. As part of the New Rock scene they released a couple albums. Meanwhile, Sandy O'Neal, a child of a mixed marriage between an American serviceman and a Japanese woman returned to Japan. She had grown up in Okinawa and Hawaii and had just come from Chicago where she was attending an art school to visit her Japanese grandmother when in 1976 she decided to enter a song contest. Her song "Mystery Nile" won the competition. Not long after the contest, she joined the Sunset Gang. Together they released an album, *Dixie Fever*, in 1977. Between 1977 and 1980, however, she was also doing solo performances and opening for Sakamoto Kyû. In addition, she provided the vocals to the Yellow Magic Orchestra track "Absolute Ego Dance" on the album *Solid State Survivor*. By 1980, the group signed with YMO's label Alfa and Sandy had changed her name to Sandii Suzuki.¹²¹

The 1980 album *Eatin' Pleasure* was produced by Hosono Harumi. While the album was only credited to Sandii, members of both the Sunset Gang and Yellow Magic Orchestra play on the album. The track "Alive," sung entirely in English, features Sandii's warbling vocals, influenced perhaps by Yoko Ono, over synthesizer and electric guitar— far different from Matsuda Seiko's debut. While the album was not a big seller

¹²¹ Nicholas D. Kent and Paul Rymer, "Sandii and The Sunsetz" *Japanese Electronic Music* 31 Oct 1998
<http://www.oceanofk.org/artskool/jem/ss.html> [03 Aug 1999]; McClure *Nippon Pop* 60.

Matsuda Seiko's debut. While the album was not a big seller in Japan, the band did generate some international interest. In 1981, Columbia released The Sunsetz next album, *Heat Scale*, also produced by Hosono, in both Europe and Australia and the group toured there. While the Japanese version was credited to simply the Sunsetz, the European and Australian editions named the band Sandii and The Sunsetz. The name stuck and all their releases up until 1990 had that name.¹²²

By 1987, the Sunsetz started to move in other directions musically. While they kept in musical contact with Hosono and Ryûichi Sakamoto, the Sunsetz started to adopt a more reggae influenced sound. In 1990, while The Sunsetz name was dropped from the album covers, the group remained together and started to branch out further to other Asian pop styles, such as from Hong Kong, Thailand and India. Sandii also began to sing in other languages besides just English and Japanese, an unusual move for an Japanese pop star, where Japanese, English and French were the languages of choice since the 1970s. In an effort to gain popularity throughout Asia, Sandii began to sing in Mandarin, Malay, Hawaiian, and Indonesian as well as Japanese and English.¹²³

Another band that has a lot of influence and some international exposure, though not as nearly long lasting, is The Plastics. As a group, they were only together from 1979 to 1981. Made up of Chica Sato, Toshio Nakanishi, Hajime Tachibana, Masahida Sakuma and Takemi Shima, they shortened their names to simply chica, toshi, hajime, ma-chan and

¹²² Kent and Rymer; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 60.

¹²³ Kent and Rymer; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 60.

their names to simply chica, toshi, hajime, ma-chan and shima, respectively. Musically, they took Southern All Stars nonsensical lyrics to their logical extreme, by singing little non-sequiturs or meaningless bits of words. Underneath was sparse, staccato guitars and synthesizers; their sound has been compared to early B-52's.¹²⁴

A good example of The Plastics music is "Robot" from the album *Welcome Back Plastics* from 1981. Over very sparse instrumentation that sounds faintly stereotypical Oriental, the singer frantically sings various abbreviations ("IBM/NHK/TDK/CIA") and then asserts "You are Robot." This robotic motif is further enhanced by using a Speak and Spell during the bridge to spell out "You Robot, I Plastic." In the song "Good" from the same album, the lyrics consist of little snatches of daily conversations; "What did you do today?/ I went to a sound check." This sort of deconstruction of musical conventions made the band much admired by the growing independent music movement.

The independent music movement got a big boost by a technology that was introduced in 1983, compact discs. Compact discs made it more affordable for most people to buy music and small labels to produce albums. Because of the format's relatively small size, it now became possible for the average record store to carry a larger selection of titles.¹²⁵ After a sales slump that started in 1980, total record sales broke the ¥300 billion mark in 1987. This was mainly due to the strength of CD sales, which exceeded

¹²⁴ Nicholas D. Kent "Plastics" *Japanese Electronic Music* 27 Nov 1998
<http://www.oceanofk.org/artskool/jem/plas.html> [03 Aug 1999]

¹²⁵ Schilling 99.

mainly due to the strength of CD sales, which exceeded cassette and LP sales for the first time in July of that year. By 1990, compact discs accounted for 95% of sales in the Japanese market.¹²⁶

In the mid 1980s, record companies, starting with Nippon Columbia, began to react to the shifting focus from idols to groups, the rise of the independent labels and increasingly crowded market. One of the more intriguing reactions was applying the concept of value engineering to popular music marketing and production. Value engineering is a branch of engineering that focuses on making processes more efficient and cost effective. Usually, it is applied to industrial or service situations or occasionally in product develop. The overall goal is to improve customer satisfaction, the customer defined variously depending on the situation. For example, the customer might be another department of your company. Value engineering might be used for improving how a part or component is handled from one section to another. Or, the customer might be the end user of a new product.¹²⁷

In the mid-1980s, Nakajo Hyozo, a value engineer at Nippon Columbia developed what he called "kansei value engineering." Traditional value engineering concentrates on what processes need be accomplished, but little on how it should be done. Kansei sought to add "human sensibility" to value engineering by emphasizing often secondary considerations to a particular service; aesthetics, emotional

¹²⁶ Kawabata 329.

¹²⁷ "What is Value Engineering?" *SAVE International* n.d.
<http://www.value-eng.com/default/whatis.html> [28 Nov 1999]

and tactile responses, et cetera.¹²⁸ At the same time, kansei allowed value engineering concepts to be applied to other areas, most notably popular music. By doing this, it also demonstrates how refined the idol system had become.

The process was broken down into 10 steps. An example used in the Japanese reports on the process is the circa 1989 single "*Furimukeba Yokohama* [If You Turn To Yokohama]" by Marcia. This specific example also demonstrates some of the considerations that record company executive made when marketing their idols. The first step in the process is determining the basic objectives. In this particular case, these are developing customer's projected needs, developing and debuting a new artist and strengthening the pop and rock market. The second step is giving a survey to determine what sort of moods and feelings people like in music.¹²⁹

From the survey, the next step is to establish the keywords for the project. For this particular project, themes of belonging to a group (*shûdan e no sazoku*), self-respect (*jison*) and image words like tranquility, fun, loneliness, ornateness and adultness were common responses. Then the concept of the song is put together. Factors such as the image of the artist, the theme of the lyrics and style of the music are taken into account. In the case of the illustrative project, the project designers wanted a singer with a stylish and exotic mood. The lyrics would be about an

¹²⁸ Hyozo Nakajo "A 'Kansei' Approach To V.E. That Maximizes The Use Of Human Senses" *SAVE International Conference Proceedings 1997* (n.p.: SAVE International, c. 1997) 194-97.

¹²⁹ Nakano Hyozo "*Ongaku Shôhin no Kikaku Seisaku Dankai ni Okeru VE ni Tsuite* [Concerning Using VE in the Planning Stage of Productions in The Music Industry]" *Value Engineering* September 1993: 14-15, 45.

with a stylish and exotic mood. The lyrics would be about an unattached young woman, reminiscing about an old love. This reminiscing would take place at a hotel on the bay in Yokohama. The melody accompanying the lyrics would have a melancholy feel.¹³⁰

In some respects, this sort of planning inverts the traditional concept of creative endeavors— finding out what people will buy and then writing a song to fit that concept rather than some vague notion that the songwriter is expressing some inner vision. Furthermore, it confirms the worst fears of cultural commentators that mainstream popular music is purely commercial with no “soul,” designed strictly to sell records. However, it does not preclude people, once the record has been purchased or listened to, in using the music in a variety of ways. Nor does it, despite the value engineer’s best efforts, guarantee that people will buy the record in the first place.

The fourth step in applying value engineering to the production of popular music is determining the weight to give to each element of the total presentation. The project managers decide, given the keywords and the concept formed in the third step, whether to emphasize the artist, the music or the lyrics. After that determination is made, a list of singers and composers among the available choices is made to determine which is the best choice. Once the keywords have been gathered, the weight of each element is determined and figuring out which artists best suit the project, a final decision is made on who should write and perform the song.

¹³⁰ Nakano “*VE ni Tsuite*” 16, 45.

decision is made on who should write and perform the song. Note that through the first six steps not a single note of music has been written; rather, information is gathered to determine how the song will turn out. The determination of Marcia for singing what eventually would become "*Furimukeba Yokohama*" emphasizes the thought processes that are involved. Marcia was a scout for TV Tokyo's "Foreigner's Song Contest [*Gaikokujin Kayô Daikai*]" in 1986. She made her mark with "city pops," songs that concern particular cities, usually Tokyo or Osaka. Songs that are set in particular cities have been common since the 1930s and in the late 1970s to the mid 1980s, they grew again in popularity. The most telling factor was the fact that Marcia is a third generation Japanese Brazilian. This automatically gives her a "unique sense" and an exotic air about her.¹³¹

Before the song is actually written, a final mathematical estimation is made to determine if the selections made in the sixth step will meet the goals laid out in the first three steps. At this point, the song is written and production work for the singer is begun. Once the song is ready, determinations of how much to spend on promotion and how they should proceed, what form the single should take and the total cost target are made. Once the single is issued, a review of all the steps is made to make sure that everything worked out as planned.¹³²

As the layout of the ten steps demonstrates, creative decisions such as song writing, singing and marketing are

¹³¹ Nakano, "*VE ni Tsuite*" 17, 45.

¹³² Nakano, "*VE ni Tsuite*" 17-18, 45.

decisions such as song writing, singing and marketing are placed at the end of the process. Nippon Columbia claims that sales of its singles grew steadily since implementing the system in the late 1980s.¹³³ But the reason for this inversion is clear. The record companies, faced with a rapidly expanding and changing music market, wanted both more direct control over what they issued- something they had lost with the rise in popularity of New Music and independent labels since the mid 1970s- and more certainty in making sure that their single was successful in a crowded market place. But one thing that is could not quite deal with was the changing tastes and buying habits, though certainly the ideas behind the value engineering approach would persist into the 1990s.

By the mid-1980s, despite the best efforts of record companies, the tastes of the consumers were changing once again. The popularity of compact discs and other technology made it even easier for the average consumer to have access to a wider range of musical styles. In turn, Japanese artists, for example Sandii and the Sunsets, began to look for inspiration from other sources. Rather than drawing from a single influence or set of influences, these groups began to take in multiple, disparate influences. Furthermore, artists began to actively tap into the international pop music arena searching for new styles and similarly minded musicians worldwide. In short, Japanese popular music was diversifying to encompass an ever wider range of styles. This often dizzying and sometimes surprising range of styles

¹³³ Nakano, "VE ni Tsuite" 45.

This often dizzying and sometimes surprising range of styles and juxtapositions will be analyzed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

DIVERSIFICATION: 1985-present

This is recycled attitude.
 -"L'Adventure Fantastique" by Fantastic Plastic Machine¹

In the mid 1980s, with a booming economy and compact discs bringing an even wider variety of music into the country, the popular music scene began once again to transform. Rock and Western style pop had been the dominant musical form for the previous 10 to 15 years. The first generation to have grown up with rock and see it folded into the Japanese musical repertoire had come of age. Rock was no longer confined to a single style as it had during the 1960s and 1970s; the rubric of "rock" covered anything from the good time music of Hound Dog or Southern All Stars to the dark, eclectic work of Sandii and The Sunsets and The Plastics. Pop showed a similar broad range; from the bright cheery songs of Matsuda Seiko to the quirky dance music of Yellow Magic Orchestra to the personal, folk inspired songs of Yuming. With compact discs making it easier to obtain a wider range of pop and rock styles from the West, such as punk, new wave, rap, and heavy metal, in addition to the already broadening musical palette that had developed in Japan, led interesting adaptations and combinations. For

¹ Fantastic Plastic Machine, *The Fantastic Plastic Machine*, Emperor Norton, EMN 7008-2, 1998.

Japan, led interesting adaptations and combinations. For example, groups like Alice, Tulip, The Alfee and Monta & Brothers combined rock, folk and pop in a style that was complex, in the manner of New Music, but didn't adopt some of the quirks of the New Musicians, such as no television appearances.² At the same time, with a greater range of Western pop styles being performed by Japanese artists, in the late 1980s, Japanese artists began to seriously look outside Japan, to Asia, Europe and America, to promote themselves, as seen by artists like Sandii and The Sunsetz. Furthermore, the major record companies began to sign a wider range of acts because the booming economy made them more willing to take risks as well as in response to the newly formed independent labels.

The mid to late 1980s was also a time of increased possibilities, both financially and technologically. Since the mid-1970s, the number of white collared *sarariiman* had steadily increased. Until the early 1980s, male white-collar workers were primarily singing karaoke after work. Karaoke, derived from the words "kara", meaning empty, and "oke", short of orchestra, is singing songs along with a recorded instrumental version, usually in a public place. Recordings that had the vocal part missing had been produced by Music Minus One, an American company, since 1950. However, these recordings were intended for professionals to use during practice.³ Karaoke, on the hand, was designed specifically

² Schilling 314.

practice.³ Karaoke, on the hand, was designed specifically for amateurs. Its origin is uncertain, but it seems to have started in the Kansai area in either Osaka or Kobe in the early 1970s. One person who claimed to have invented karaoke was Kisaburo Takashiro. While managing a record store in Osaka, he discovered that a local bar was hiring an organist to accompany its patrons, mostly males in their forties and fifties, for 500 to 1000 yen a song. Takashiro built a machine using 8-track tapes with a catalog of about 400 mostly *enka* songs. He charged 100 yen a song and made the money back in three months.⁴ Another version of the story states that a bar in Kobe in 1972 decided to use the backup tapes for its hired singer to allow patrons to sing.⁵ Yet another version says that a Kobe bar used accompaniment tapes for the patrons when a traveling guitarist got sick.⁶ The All-Japan Karaoke Industrialist Association credit the introduction of a multi 8-track player with 2 microphones along with the release by Taiyô Records of 8-track tapes of songs with the vocal missing, designed for singing lessons, in 1971 as the start of karaoke.⁷

However karaoke got started, the environment and song selection was mostly oriented towards older males. The early

³ "About Music Minus One" *A Classical and Participatory Recording Catalog from Music Minus One* 1999 <http://www.minusone.com/aboutus.htm> [20 Feb 2000].

⁴ Schilling 87.

⁵ McClure *Nippon Pop* 146-47.

⁶ "The History Of Karaoke" *Karaoke Scene* n.d. <http://www.karaoke-scene.com/history.html> [20 February 2000].

⁷ "Karaoke Rekishi Nenpyô [Chronological Table of Karaoke History]" Zenkoku Karaoke Jigyôsha Kyôkai [*All-Japan Karaoke Industrialist Association*] 1999 <http://www.interq.or.jp/hpp/sly/karaoke/y-history1.html> [20 February 2000].

selection was mostly oriented towards older males. The early systems were basically an 8-track player and microphone hooked up a loudspeaker, and the sound quality and the clunkiness of the equipment left much to be desired. Furthermore, most of the early songs made available for karaoke singing ranged from World War Two era military songs to *enka*. By the 1970s, *enka* was favored only by those over 30. The younger generation preferred New Music, folk, New Rock or idol singers. As a result, karaoke remained limited in its appeal—mainly to middle-aged men who participated after work.⁸ Nevertheless, for those who enjoyed *enka*, singing karaoke was fairly common. A 1982 NHK survey revealed that 80% of men over 30 had used karaoke in bars or at parties.⁹

The first real improvement to karaoke came in 1983, when the compact disc and laserdisc were introduced. Overall, the sound quality improved and the ability to display lyrics on a television screen eliminated the need for bulky lyric books. The real change, however, came in 1986 with the introduction of the karaoke boxes, also known as karaoke cabins, clubs or rooms. A Nagoya entrepreneur struck upon the idea by taking some abandoned rail cars, dividing them up into booths and outfitting each with karaoke gear. For a low hourly fee, anyone could privately and cheaply sing to their hearts' content. Most bars with karaoke required the patrons to buy their own bottle, usually starting with ¥10,000 for a bottle of Johnny Walker, and an entire room would have to share the

⁸ Schilling 87.

⁹ Herd 83.

of Johnny Walker, and an entire room would have to share the equipment. The karaoke boxes opened up who would be interested in karaoke, by allowing people to purchase their own drinks inexpensively and letting them sing as often as they wished.¹⁰

The nature of the clientele also changed with the introduction of the karaoke boxes. By the late 1980s, about 60 percent of patrons at karaoke boxes were female.¹¹ By the mid 1990s, this number had increased to 70 percent.¹² Fujio sees the introduction of the karaoke boxes as one of the three major elements of popular culture that had profound societal impact, the other two being anime and the home video game.¹³ All three of these made their impact felt in the early 1980s.

Anime, or Japanese animation, had been around since the 1960s, and manga (comics) had long been popular in Japan. However, with the release of series of such as "Macross" and "Space Cruiser Yamato" (known in the US as "Robotech" and "Star Blazers" respectively) in the late 1970s and early 1980s as well as movies such as *Galaxy Express 999* and *Nausicaä Of The Valley Of The Wind*, a dedicated "fandom," began to develop and form themselves into clubs and loose associations. This is about the same time that similar associations began to form around idol singers. The home video game system, or the *famicon* ("family computer"), introduced by Nintendo in the mid 1980s engendered a similar

¹⁰ Mark Schilling "Karaoke in the 21st Century" *Mangajin* 48 (Sept. 1995): 19.

¹¹ Schilling "Karaoke" 20.

¹² Fujio 6.

¹³ Fujio 7-8.

introduced by Nintendo in the mid 1980s engendered a similar response. While these fan clubs represent only an overall small percentage of the population, what it does suggest is that these were pervasive and readily available.

Furthermore, a broad percentage of the population had enough disposable income to spend on these entertainment items to such a degree that one could become obsessed over them.

From the late 1970s, the desire for leisure items manifested itself in multiple ways, including travel internationally and nationally discussed in Chapter Three. People had increased wealth and education, but the pressures of both work and school pushed many to seek leisure in different ways. For example, they bought manga in ever larger numbers. In 1966, *Shônen Magazine*, a manga aimed nominally at boys, but read by a broad age range of males, had a circulation of one million copies a week. By 1978, *Shônen Jump*, another similarly targeted publication, passed the 2 million a week mark and in December 1984 sold over 4 million copies in a week.¹⁴

While record sales slowed down in the late 1970s and did not pick up again until the mid 1980s, the market continued to diversify and grow slowly, in part because of some the increase was absorbed by record rentals.¹⁵ Starting with the introduction of the Walkman by Sony in 1979, karaoke boxes, VCRs, home video game systems and CD players were all part of the new wave of consumer electronics that were introduced in the early to mid-1980s. While technological advances had

¹⁴ Frederik L. Schodt *Manga! Manga!: The World of Japanese Comics* (1986; Tokyo: Kodansha 1988) 67.

¹⁵ Kimura 319.

the early to mid-1980s. While technological advances had made such relatively complex items affordable for a wider range of people, consumption of leisure goods in general played a major role in their popularity. Many of these items, most notably the VCR, Walkman and CD player, had the dual effect of making a wider range of other cultural products available, in this case movies and music, and allowed consumers to interact with those cultural products in a more individualized way- no longer dependent on what was presented on television or at the movie theater. It also helped that these new technologies were relatively small in size, and thus more likely to fit into the Japanese home. Karaoke boxes continued this trend of a more personal interaction with popular music, by allowing people to figuratively make a song their own.¹⁶

The karaoke boxes became a place to enjoy relatively inexpensive entertainment. Boxes could be in any urban or suburban area because they did not need to be especially large. While the boxes allowed for small groups to sing privately, they also became an important place to socialize, especially for women. The karaoke boxes created a space where women could drink, socialize and generally relieve stress, as well as avoiding the harassment often found in traditional bars.¹⁷ Furthermore, the karaoke boxes provided an additional arena for gossip, away from the prying ears of men. As Ogasawara notes, gossiping about co-workers, especially male co-workers, was both a form of entertainment

¹⁶ Kimura 320.

¹⁷ Fujio 9-11.

especially male co-workers, was both a form of entertainment for OLs ("office ladies") and a roundabout means of criticizing men. OLs often went to the karaoke boxes after work to socialize and gossip amongst themselves as well as sing.¹⁸

Women of all ages, not just OLs, used the karaoke boxes for recreation. High school aged girls went to the boxes for many of the same reasons that OLs did— it is seen as being trendy, they can communicate with their friends, and above all it was fun.¹⁹ Married women used the karaoke boxes as a forum to gossip about their husbands and work, as well as a place to meet for PTA meetings.²⁰ Surprisingly, women in college have the lowest rates of karaoke use. While they face many of the same pressures and stresses that all women face, Fujio theorizes that college aged women have greater opportunity to travel and do other recreational activities, such as skiing and hiking. High school aged girls, because of the emphasis on trying to get into college, must study constantly and can not spare the time that even a short trip requires. Older women have work and family to worry about and thus have similar concerns. The karaoke boxes provide a liminal space for a quick, fun activity that is a relief from daily stresses.²¹

Because of the popularity with women, there has been a number of changes in both how karaoke is marketed and how, in turn, popular music has been transformed. There have also

¹⁸ Yuko Ogasawara *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender, and Work in Japanese Companies* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P 1998) 70-88.

¹⁹ Fujio 28.

²⁰ Fujio 50-51.

²¹ Fujio 62-64.

turn, popular music has been transformed. There have also been changes in how people relate to popular music. Karaoke has become a ¥220 million a year industry and a major means of promoting a song, in addition to radio and television airplay.²² Now, instead of *enka*, karaoke menus feature songs by a wide range of popular artists, mainly from Japan, but also a selection of songs by international artists.²³ In turn, many Japanese pop song writers and producers specifically write songs that are karaoke friendly—easy to follow lyrics, catchy but simple melodies. Often, success on the karaoke chart, which is a compilation of the most popular songs in the karaoke boxes, is just as important as success on the sales chart. Usually, songs on the singles chart will become popular on the karaoke chart.

The karaoke boxes have also changed how people relate to popular music. Instead of just listening to sad songs or singing along with them, people will go to karaoke boxes and choose particular songs to sing if they have relationship troubles.²⁴ The karaoke boxes also become safe spaces where people can act out the fantasy of being their favorite singer. Some karaoke rooms help further this fantasy by offering a wide range of vocal sweeteners (devices that raise or lower the pitch of the singer), slightly raised stages, and colored lights.²⁵ This narcissistic desire to be seen and treated as a star and to reveal some inner self, especially by young women, has been exploited in advertising and popular

²² McClure 146-147.

²³ One of the more surreal experiences I've had with the karaoke boxes was singing Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" in Tokyo.

²⁴ Fujio 15-16.

²⁵ Fujio 34.

by young women, has been exploited in advertising and popular culture, such as travel advertisements,²⁶ and karaoke boxes can be seen as another manifestation of this trend.

Karaoke was but one of the many forces that effected Japanese popular music and the labels for it began to reflect those changes. In the mid 1980s, record stores began to label newer Japanese popular music "J-Pop," while older music became *kayôkyoku*. Throughout the 1990s, official record company records of sales still called all releases by domestic artists *kayôkyoku*,²⁷ but the new label J-Pop reflected the music's changing character, which was distinct from older types of popular music.

While the labels for the music and some of the means of promotion, such as karaoke, had changed, other things remained the same. Television was still the most powerful means of promotion for an artist. As of 1996, there was only 46 commercial FM radio stations, though that number has been slowly increasing. Until 1988, the Ministry of Posts and Communications only allowed one FM commercial station per prefecture. Stations like FM Yokohama and J-Wave in the Tokyo metro area and JOFE FM 802 in the Osaka area were some of the first stations to start after the loosening of the restrictions.²⁸ Still, the character of Japanese radio is similar to British radio, having a general playlist with specialized shows, focusing on a particular style or the

²⁶ Ivy 39.

²⁷ Kawabata 331.

²⁸ Fukatsu 68.

tastes of the regularly scheduled DJ.²⁹ The playlists of the various stations vary, ranging from having heavy doses of Western music, such as J-Wave, FM 802 and FM Yokohama, to focusing more on Japanese popular music, such as Tokyo FM and many of the outlying stations (FM Yamagata, for example). While some of the former stations, most notably FM Yokohama, will have DJs that speak in both English and Japanese, a couple stations, InterFM in Tokyo and Co-Co-Lo FM in Osaka, were started to specifically broadcast to the foreign population, having shows in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese and Korean. Interestingly, 80% of the listeners of these stations are Japanese.³⁰

While all of these technical changes were occurring, the late 1980s saw a major shift in the popularity of what sort of acts were popular. While the solo and duo acts continued to debut and some even became popular, group acts began to dominate the charts. This was not just limited to those that started out as garage bands or those that first played club dates, but extended to idol groups, created by a new group of promoters. While this new shift in group acts generated international interest in Japanese popular music, the groups at the fringes of the mainstream attracted the most attention outside of Japan.

An early case in point is the Japanese heavy metal scene. While the Japanese charts through most of the 1980s were dominated by idols, a set of artists more influenced by

²⁹ Thornton 129. It should be noted that in the Japanese case, pirate radio stations did not spring up to cater to a particular genre as they did in England. See Thornton 148-150.

³⁰ Fukatsu 68.

were dominated by idols, a set of artists more influenced by Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and KISS had also begun to put out records. Japanese heavy metal acts were some of the earliest beneficiaries of the record companies' willingness to sell records with a niche appeal. The two most successful heavy metal acts were Loudness and EZO.

Loudness signed with ATCO and released 5 albums internationally. Their first, *Thunder From The East*, broke into the Billboard Top 100 album chart. The group originally formed in 1981 and started touring the West Coast of the United States in 1983, playing what has been described as a cross between Ozzy Osbourne and Mötley Crüe; loud, aggressive rock with lots of hairspray and tight leather pants. Eventually, they opened for acts like Stryper and Iron Maiden. EZO signed soon after Loudness and put out two records internationally, the first produced by Gene Simmons of the band KISS. Like KISS, the band performed in full face makeup.³¹

Jeff McDonald, lead singer of the Los Angeles band Redd Kross, has cited EZO as one of his influences. Redd Kross also had a role in bringing to international attention Shonen Knife. The Osaka group is probably the best known Japanese punk band. The three women in Shonen Knife got together in 1981. College friends Nakatami Michie and Yamano Naoko both had a passion for the Ramones and Gang of Four, and decided to recruit Naoko's sister Atsuko to put together a band. The band's name comes from a brand of boy's pocket knife. The goal at first was to play just one live gig. The three had

³¹ Nito Gan and Jeff Yang, "Japanese Heavy Metal Bands" *EST* 264.

goal at first was to play just one live gig. The three had never played instruments before, but they bought guitars and drums and learned how to play them, in keeping with the punk ideal of do-it-yourself. They played in Osaka clubs and eventually signed with the Osaka independent label, Zero. Meanwhile, the group continued to work their day jobs as OLs.³²

In 1986, Jeff McDonald saw a bootleg videotape of a Shonen Knife show and instantly fell in love with the group. He helped them get their first US gig in Los Angeles in 1988 and helped put together a tribute album in 1989 called *Every Band Has A Shonen Knife*, with Shonen Knife songs covered by US punk groups like L7 and Sonic Youth. Finally, in 1990, two compilations of their releases on Zero were issued in the United States. In 1991, Shonen Knife went on an American tour, later opening for Nirvana in the UK.³³ Kurt Cobain of Nirvana later wrote that touring with the band and seeing them perform "made people happy and it made me happy knowing that I had helped bring them to the U.K."³⁴ Shonen Knife's UK appearance helped propel the band's version of "White Christmas" to hit number one on the indie charts in England. In 1992, the band signed with Virgin and released two albums, 1992's *Let's Knife* and 1994's *Rock Animals*. They toured the United States and Canada again in 1994 and played Lollapalooza 1997, a traveling rock festival that featured a wide range of modern rock acts. Shonen Knife released *Brand*

³² Steve McClure, "Japanese Pop Music: A Beginner's Guide" *Mangajin* 36 (June 1994): 18-19; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 103; Lee and Yang 263.

³³ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 103-04; Lee and Yang 263.

³⁴ Kurt Cobain, *Incesticide* liner notes, DGC, DGCD-24504, 1992.

wide range of modern rock acts. Shonen Knife released *Brand New Knife* in 1996 on a different label. While *Rock Animals* sold only 50,000 copies in Japan, it sold over 100,000 internationally. Shonen Knife is one of the first Japanese groups to become better known outside of Japan than inside; their success, which was much like Yellow Magic Orchestra's a decade earlier, prompted many overseas to take another look at the Japanese music scene.³⁵

The appeal of Shonen Knife is their blending of hard punk rock, which they prove they can do on a raucous version of the Kinks' "Till The End Of The Day", with comic, kitschy and cute singing and lyrics. They can equally play off a Natsume Soseki novel ("I Am A Cat" from *Let's Knife*) and rhapsodize over commercial icons ("Fruit Loop Dreams"). Nakatami Naoko and Yamano Michie, who do the songwriting for the group, have the same sort of outlook, playing on and parodying the cuteness women were suppose to exhibit in Japanese society. The foremost example of this cuteness were idols like Matsuda Seiko, who deliberately exploited this childish image. Thus, songs like "Fruit Loop Dreams" with lyrics like "There's a big bird named Toucan Sam/ With a pretty colored beak like a candy cane" or "Strawberry Cream Puff"— "I had nothing to call my own before I ate strawberry cream puff" — are at once silly and underscores a changing image for women in society. By being so over the top lyrically and juxtaposed with the aggressive punk instrumentation, the songs highlight how ridiculous that

³⁵ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 103-04; Lee and Yang 263.

image the band is playing off of is.³⁶

While Loudness and Shonen Knife were more on the fringes for most of their careers, by the late 1980s, bands of all types, most playing rock, began to take center stage. Some groups, such as Rebecca, Princess Princess, and Show-Ya, all female rock groups, were formed by talent agencies. It was the success of Rebecca in particular that was one major impetus for the so-called "band boom" that followed. Groups like Princess Princess and Rebecca, though formed by a production house, had a distinct difference from the idols of the 1970s and early 1980s. While the groups looked good on television, they also played instruments and often took a tough and sassy attitude. Musically, these groups took their cues partially from the heavy metal bands like Loudness and EZO and partially from the so-called "hairspray rockers" that were popular in America in late 1980s- Poison, Lita Ford, and Vixen. The music was mostly electric guitar and drums, but not quite as loud and aggressive as Loudness.³⁷ Even acts that mainly were suppose to look good on television, like Hikaru Genji and WINK. were formed into groups. Then there were the rock groups, like The Boom, Jun Skywalker(s), and Flipper's Guitar that started out playing in the street, such as in Yoyogi Park and Harajuku on Sundays, and in small clubs. There was a rise in the number venues, both small and large, where these new bands could perform because of renewed interest in hearing live music. This also helped drive the band boom. Collectively, these groups expanded the idea of

³⁶ Shonen Knife, *Brown Mushrooms and Other Delights*, Virgin, V25H-38414 1994; McClure, "Japanese Pop Music" 19.

³⁷ Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 231.

band boom. Collectively, these groups expanded the idea of idolism by emphasizing that an "idol" could come from anywhere, not just a production house, and come in any form.³⁸

The biggest signal that bands were becoming popular came when the show *Heisei Meibutsu TV: Ikasu Bando Tengoku* [Heisei Attractions TV: Hotshot Band Heaven], often shortened to *Ikaten* (a pun on the name of squid tempura) debuted in February 1989. Despite being shown on Saturdays at 12:30 a.m. to 3:00 a.m. on Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS), the show garnered a five percent rating, compared to between one and two percent for other shows in similar time slots. The show was essentially a battle of the bands, reminiscent of the *ereki* band shows of the mid-1960s, where amateurs would compete week after week, for the chance to perform on television and in hopes of receiving a recording contract.³⁹

The band boom scared many in the music industry because most were used to dealing with prepackaged talent.⁴⁰ As mentioned in Chapter Three, the record companies responded to this seeming threat in several different ways. Some applied value engineering to idol singers, in hopes of increasing sales of prepackaged talent; others signed as many bands as possible, starting about 1986. Thus funk groups like Kome Kome Club, independent producer driven groups like Pizzicato Five, and New Music influenced folk rock groups like The Passengers and Salon Music were all snapped up by the big

³⁸ Bruce Sterling and Mami Ikeda, "Shout Sister Shout: Inside and Outside Japanese Pop Music," *Whole Earth Review* 69 (1990): 80-81; Kawabata 338; Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 231.

³⁹ Sugawara Nobuo, "Overnight Celebrities," *Japan Quarterly* 37 (1990): 339.

⁴⁰ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 14.

Passengers and Salon Music were all snapped up by the big labels. Some of the production houses responded by debuting singing idol groups about the same age as the bands that appeared on *Ikaten*. Hikaru Genji, SMAP and WINK were all idol groups whose members were aged between fourteen and sixteen that made their debut in 1988.⁴¹

However, the popularity of *Ikaten* and the band boom effectively killed many of the television music shows that idols depended on for promotion. Matsuda Seiko's string of number ones ended in 1988 coincided with the end of the golden age of idols. By the early 1990s, most of the idol dominated shows were off the air, as the band boom bands took over the charts.⁴² Still, as Fred Varcoe observes:

Even as it started, the band boom was signing its own death warrant. It was a case of too many bands with too little talent, marketed by too many non-musicians with too much greed, pushed by too many magazines with too few scruples to too many fans with not enough brains to see that too many bands had too little talent.⁴³

While Varcoe may have overstated the case a little, it does accurately highlight the main problem of the band boom.

Bands were forming basically so they could appear on *Ikaten*. Instead of concentrating on song writing and playing, many would simply work up outrageous stage antics, like performing in swim trunks or in full kabuki makeup.⁴⁴ Despite this, just as in the Group Sounds era, record labels signed as many groups and issued as many records as they

⁴¹ Kinsella 235.

⁴² Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 232.

⁴³ Fred Varcoe, "Japanese Band Boom Goes Bust," *Billboard* 12 June 1993: J-7

⁴⁴ Sugawara 341.

signed as many groups and issued as many records as they could. The bands became a sort of fashion, with the emphasis just on looks instead of sound. Eventually there were just too many groups that were only looking for a quick profit. When the economic downturn came in late 1992 and early 1993, the boom quickly ended. The record companies could no longer support all the bands on their roster and many were quickly dropped.⁴⁵

While many of the groups of the band boom broke up, even some of the more critically acclaimed groups like The Passengers and Sheena & The Rokkets, others regrouped. Again similar to the Group Sounds era, band boom groups tended to appeal mostly to young teenage girls. However, this time, the groups that survived the boom, mostly duo and trios, had a much broader appeal. Groups like Dreams Come True and B'z, while still performing pop music, were equally concerned with their sound and their look. The band boom and its subsequent bust prefigured a major shift in Japanese popular music, just as the Group Sounds era groups did. The division between young, good looking singers, represented by the idols, and highly skilled pop music songcraft, represented by the New Musicians, was starting to weaken.

These groups were also selling phenomenal amounts of compact discs, with Dreams Come True's 1993 CD, *The Swinging Star* selling more than 4 million units, the biggest selling Japanese album to that date.⁴⁶ Led by vocalist Yoshida Miwa, along with bassist and arranger Nakamura Masato and

⁴⁵ Sterling and Ikeda 82; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 14; Varcoe J-7.

⁴⁶ Varcoe J-8.

along with bassist and arranger Nakamura Masato and keyboardist Nishimura Takahiro, Dreams Come True debuted in 1988 and immediately became the top selling pop group. Since then, they have sold over 25 million albums and singles in Japan. Yoshida is noted for her incredible vocal range, unusual for a pop singer. After strong sales in Japan, the group has since tried to branch out. They sold over 200,000 copies of their 1996 album *Love Unlimited* in Taiwan, an unprecedented number for a Japanese act, and have expressed an interest in singing in Mandarin or Cantonese. They also tried to break into the US market, by rerecording their 1997 album *Sing Or Die* in English and releasing it internationally on Virgin. While the album did not sell very well in the United States, Dreams Come True are part of a definite trend of more Japanese acts trying to expand their scope beyond just Japan.⁴⁷

Other bands transformed their image to survive the change to the new trend. Kome Kome Club is a good case in point. The group debuted in 1985 and was soon signed to Sony. While the main selling point of the band was the slick, fast paced and funny live show full of elaborate costume changes, in the manner of Parliament and Funkadelic, the group's R&B/funk influenced sound and lead singer Carl "Smokey" Ishii's singing gained many fans. Yet, by 1992, the band transformed its sound to more straight pop, if still a little R&B influenced. That year, they had the top selling single for the year "*Kimi ga Iru dake de* [There Is Only You]" backed with "*Ai Shiteru* [Loving You]," selling more than 2.76

⁴⁷ Steve McClure, "Seiko and Sukiyaki: An excursion into Japanese Pop" *Winds* July 1997: 38-39, English section; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 34.

single for the year "*Kimi ga Iru dake de* [There Is Only You]" backed with "*Ai Shiteru* [Loving You]," selling more than 2.76 million copies.⁴⁸ The songs, which eventually showed up on their 1995 compilation album *Decade*, show that while the band may have toned down its origins, it has not completely forgotten them. Many of the songs are love songs, but there are also dance and party songs, like "Shake Hip!" or the nonsensical "FUNKY FUJIYAMA," a jumble of stereotypical Japanese images strung together over a dance beat.⁴⁹ Because the band boom had broken down the division created in the 1970s of the idols dominating the singles chart and television while New Musicians dominated the album charts, groups like Kome Kome Club could be musically adventurous in the manner of New Music but still have wider chart success.

Other bands like The Boom also started to branch out musically. Originally, The Boom was more ska influenced when they formed in 1986 and became a regular in Yoyogi Park before signing with a record label. By the mid-1990s, the group had expanded its experimentation to include Okinawan, Latin and Malaysian sounds.⁵⁰

Another effect of the band boom was that it broadened out the number of styles that could chart and sell well in Japan. The independent record companies, or indies, were some of the biggest beneficiaries of the band boom, as their bands were now available nationwide and sold well. An independent label is defined as a label that is not

⁴⁸ Steve McClure, "Hooked On Tie-Ups," *Billboard* 12 June 1993: J-6; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 44.

⁴⁹ Kome Kome Club, *Decade*, Sony Entertainment Ltd. (Japan), SRCL 3185, 1995.

⁵⁰ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 59.

independent label is defined as a label that is not affiliated with the 29 labels that make up RIAJ, or the Record Industry Association of Japan. It also helped that international record store chains like Rough Trade, Tower, HMV, and Virgin entered the market, making international releases and smaller Japanese labels more readily available, due to their often larger store size compared to the average record store. These stores would be strategically placed in areas where young people tended to gather, such as Ikebukuro, Shinjuku or Shibuya in Tokyo or around Yokohama Station. Even after the band boom ended, it was now a viable alternative to remain on an indie label and still sell reasonably well. Bands on the independent labels moved from being deliberately obscure towards more listenable sounds, even though in the case of punk or noise bands, that remained a matter of definition. The band boom helped foster a number of subcultures, such as punk, rap, reggae and noise that continued to support their music and fashion after the boom.⁵¹

By the early 1990s, a variety of factors made the Japanese pop music scene difficult to sum up. The band boom coincided with an enormous range of musical influences being brought into Japan, aided by the economic boom, the appearance of the large international record store chains and the better transportability of compact discs. In turn, because the television music shows had been transformed in the wake of the band boom and the number of radio stations

⁵¹ "Indie Groove" *The Economist* 28 March 1992: 104; "Kaiin Kaisya List [Member Company List]" *RAIJ Home Page* n.d. <http://riaj.japan-music.or.jp/scripts/Khn/Kaisya00.idc> [14 Aug 1999]; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 72-73.

the wake of the band boom and the number of radio stations were slowly increasing, as well as an increase in venues for acts to perform live and record labels to issue their recordings, a wider range of artists found more opportunities to promote themselves and gain a following. While Western style pop music dominated the charts, a wide range of musical styles were being performed by Japanese artists, some with their own subcultures developed around them. Some were purely musical in nature, such as the techno, acid jazz, and rap scenes, and others had a regional flavor, notably the punk/noise scene of the Osaka area and Shibuya-kei, centered around the Shibuya area in Tokyo. All of these factors created an environment where it was possible for a Japanese musician to perform in any conceivable musical genre and gain some degree of a following. To add to the confusion, a number of expatriate Japanese working primarily in the United States and England were recording albums for both Japanese and international markets but were often considered part of the Japanese music scene.

However, while the music scene in Japan fragmented, a few artists began to achieve enormous sales numbers as demonstrated by Dreams Come True and Kome Kome Club. As a point of comparison, the number one selling single of the 1980s was "Dancing All Night" by Monta & Brothers, selling 1.6 million copies. Between 1990 and 1995, eighteen singles surpassed that mark, six of them topping the two million mark.⁵²

After 1992, in the broadest terms, the Japanese music

⁵² Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 98; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 14.

After 1992, in the broadest terms, the Japanese music scene could be likened to the music scene in Europe. Guitar based rock had its practitioners and certain groups did well, such as Southern All Stars, Mr. Children, and X Japan. However, pop and dance music were the biggest sellers overall. The most visible sign of this popularity was the rise of the disco Juliana's, the record company Avex Trax and the producer/performer Komuro Tetsuya.

Juliana's was located in a former warehouse in Shiba-ura in Tokyo. It was a joint venture by Wembly PLC, the largest leisure service group in the United Kingdom, and Nishho Iwai Corp., a top Japanese trading company. It opened May 1991 at a cost of ¥1.5 billion. Initially it was to be the flagship disco for a chain throughout Japan. Appropriately, the decor reflected this flagship status. Patrons first were checked at the door for age and dress, then let through the large fractured glass doors where they were greeted by six Japanese women dressed in miniskirts, bowing in unison. From there, the patron was let into the cavernous 1200 square meter dance floor. A chandelier made in California hung from the ceiling, reflecting the multicolored laser beams. A stage was at the front of the room, and raised plexiglass platforms were placed periodically throughout the room where foreign professional dancers would take 15 minute turns dancing to the 26,000 watt sound system playing Eurobeat. Up to 3000 people at a time could be on the dancefloor and VIPs could retreat to lounges.⁵³

However, the biggest draw wasn't the music, but the

⁵³ Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 76-77.

However, the biggest draw wasn't the music, but the increasingly scantily clad women. While the men had to wear suits, the women's dress code was not as strictly enforced. The more daring women started out dancing on the raised platforms in tight fitting dresses, known in Japanese as *bodikon* (body conscience), and eventually got down to G-strings and fans. As word got out about the women, Juliana's became a top destination and compact discs of the disco's music, put together by their largely English DJs, became hot sellers.⁵⁴ The small label Avex Trax marketed these albums.

Avex Trax started out in 1988, importing dance music primarily from Europe. Starting with the success of the Juliana's discs, by the mid-1990s, it became one of the top 5 labels and a member of RIAJ. Avex Trax's success forced other labels to take dance music serious and to market it better.⁵⁵

However, as Juliana's success grew, the crowds got rowdier and the dancers too flagrant. In November 1993, Tokyo Metro Police told Juliana's that the platforms "were not a preferable place for customers to dance." In December, the platforms were reserved for professionals only and a tighter dress code was implemented. With much of the attraction taken away, the attendance dropped steeply. At its peak, the club drew 5000 people a night. By early 1994, however, it was as low as 250 people. With people no longer coming in, and unable to cover the ¥137 million a year overhead, the club closed in August 1994. The club did hold

⁵⁴ Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 77-78.

⁵⁵ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 84.

overhead, the club closed in August 1994. The club did hold one last hurrah, with an eight day celebration just before closing that drew over 40,000 people.⁵⁶

Even though Juliana's closed down, this did not mean the end of the dance craze. Juliana's successor was Velfarre, built by Avex Trax in the Roppongi district of Tokyo. Opened in December 1994, it was similar to Juliana's, with the same sort of dress code, the same ostentatious use of glass and lasers, and the same sort of music. However, instead of just playing recorded dance music mainly from Europe, Velfarre also played music from Japanese artists mainly on the Avex Trax label. The main person behind the success of Velfarre and Avex Trax was producer Komuro Tetsuya, who provided most of the music for both. Velfarre has been dubbed "the house that trf [one of Komuro's many groups] built" because of this.⁵⁷

Komuro Tetsuya, and the groups that he has produced, have had a profound impact on the Japanese music industry. With a few exceptions, until the early 1990s, producers were often just faceless record company staffers. However, just as the freelance song writers in the Group Sounds era broke down record company control of song writing, Komuro's work has done the same for producers. Komuro produced for a number of artists on different labels, as well as his own groups like trf [sic], H Jungle with T, globe [sic] and Amuro Namie on Avex Trax. By selling over 100 million albums and singles, Komuro has allowed other producers both the freedom

⁵⁶ Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 78.

⁵⁷ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 91.

singles, Komuro has allowed other producers both the freedom to move from label to label and to create their own sound.⁵⁸

Komuro is more than merely a producer, however. Komuro also composes, writes lyrics, and arranges most of the songs for the artists that he works with as well as programming and playing the synthesizer. Schilling, half jokingly, notes that he "does everything but sing and dance for them."⁵⁹

Komuro was trained in the violin from the age of 3. He first became fascinated by the synthesizer when he saw one at the 1970 Osaka Expo at the age of 12. While attending Waseda University, he played in his first band called Speedway. After Speedway broke up, in 1983, Komuro and a couple members of Speedway formed another band, TM Network. The band released its first album in 1984, *Rainbow Rainbow*. While with TM Network, Komuro started producing other performers, primarily idols like Matsuda Seiko, Miyazaki Rie and Watanabe Misato. His 1986 production of Watanabe's "My Revolution" sold 700,000 copies. Meanwhile, TM Network had a few hits on their own.⁶⁰

In 1988, Komuro decided to take a year off from TM Network to spend a year in London and learn about Western production techniques. While there, he also learned about raves, all night dances organized by DJs and synthesizer based dance music that they play.⁶¹ When Komuro returned to Japan, he decided that he wanted to concentrate on production and develop his own talent rather than performing. Komuro

⁵⁸ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 87.

⁵⁹ Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 99.

⁶⁰ Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 100-101.

⁶¹ See Thornton for a more detailed explanation of the English rave scene.

and develop his own talent rather than performing. Komuro made his first discovery, Yuki, the lead singer of trf, at an amateur dance contest in 1992.⁶²

A simple premise was behind trf, which stands for Tetsuya Rave Factory, and the first of his habitually non-capitalized groups— create music that is easy to sing along and dance to. trf consists of the vocalist Yuki, DJ Koo, who handles both the turntables and does some vocals, and three dancers, along with Komuro. Avex Trax signed the band and released trf's first album in 1993, *EZ Do Dance*.⁶³

Their biggest selling album is 1995's *dAnce to positive* [sic] which sold over 3 million copies.⁶⁴ It is also a good example of the Komuro sound with its spirited vocals, catchy choruses, techno rhythm track and a glossy, busy mix.⁶⁵ The album also provides a good example of Komuro's songwriting style. Komuro writes simple lyrics using "keywords"— words and phrases that invoke the aspirations of his target audience, mostly women in their late teens and 20s— not unlike the approach used in the application of value engineering (discussed in Chapter Three). There are similarities and differences between the approach that Komuro takes and the one that value engineering advocated. Rather than relying on the more traditional approach of discovering what sells and writing a song that fits that model, both ask the consumer directly what they want. However, unlike value engineering, which asks about themes and styles, Komuro will

⁶² Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 101.

⁶³ Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 99, 101; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 88.

⁶⁴ Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 99.

⁶⁵ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 88.

engineering, which asks about themes and styles, Komuro will often visit Velfarre and ask young women to write down their favorite phrases. He will then return to his condo where he has his own mini-studio and write the songs based on those phrases.⁶⁶ For Komuro, writing songs that include these favorite words and phrases help create a resonance with his buying audience. The result is no less calculated than value engineering, but it seems more personal (more cynical commentators like Adorno would say illusionary), since it is the work of one man, Komuro Tetsuya, rather than of a sometimes faceless record company. The attention to who is ultimately responsible for the sound of the record is not new; this attitude was common with folk and New Musicians of the 1960s and 1970s. But in the wake of the band boom, this attitude became more common- ironically at the same time that the production of idols expanded from the production houses and record companies to producers like Komuro.

Komuro uses words like "hope (*kibô*)", "dreams (*yume*)", and "love (*ai*)" often throughout *dAnce to positive*, as well liberal use of English words. All the song titles on the album have at least partially English titles. "Overnight Sensation", "CRAZY GONNA CRAZY" and "masquerade," the big hits from the album, are pretty typical examples of this. However, the album also hints that Komuro keeps a close eye on different trends throughout the world. The song "Never give up on love (Interlude)," while not credited in the liner notes, beyond giving Komuro song writing and production credit, sounds like a Komuro production of the English acid

⁶⁶ McClure, "Seiko and Sukiyaki" 35-36; Schilling *Encyclopedia* 102.

credit, sounds like a Komuro production of the English acid jazz group Incognito, with all the lyrics done in English. Komuro's talent for writing singable lyrics and catchy hooks carries over to "Never give up on love." The song sounds a little out of place in the context of the rest of the album, since it features a more R&B influenced sound compared to the more dance sound of the rest of the record. Lyrically, the song is also a bit of departure, since it is about a woman who is staying by a reluctant lover, rather than the themes of the joys of dance and hope for the future that dominate the other songs on the album. However, this style of song is more in keeping with American pop music conventions than Japanese. The song also shows that Komuro can work in other styles and be equally successful.⁶⁷ Komuro has stated he would like to work on an international scale, and even by 1995, he had received offers to work with international pop acts Kylie Minogue and Bananarama.⁶⁸ "Never give up on love" is an example of the direction Komuro would like to eventually head.

In the meantime, Komuro has continued to develop talent. He formed another group similar to trf called globe. In 1995, he transformed idol singer Arisa Tomine into Tomomi Kahala and made her the first artist on his new Orumok (Komuro spelled backwards) label; her second single, "I Believe" was a million seller. Komuro even proved he could make anyone into a hit singer. On the 22 October 1994 show of "Hey! Hey! Hey! Music Champ" Hamida Masatoshi of the

⁶⁷ trf, *dAnce to positive* Avex Trax (Japan), AVCD-11288, 1995.

⁶⁸ Komuro Tetsuya, "Wunderkind Tetsuya Komuro: An Interview With Japan's Big-Name Producer," with Steve McClure, *Billboard* 5 Aug 1995: 59.

of "Hey! Hey! Hey! Music Champ" Hamida Masatoshi of the comedy duo Downtown jokingly asked Komuro if he would write a song for him. Komuro quickly wrote "Wow War Tonight" and Hamida recorded it under the name H Jungle with T. The song became a hit in the spring of 1995. All together sales of Komuro's productions totaled ¥26.8 billion, nearly \$282 million at the 1995 exchange rate.⁶⁹ To celebrate the year, the Komuro family, along with Dreams Come True, rented out the "Saturday Night Live" stage and band and shot a Christmas special in New York.

By far though, the most successful member of the Komuro family is Amuro Namie. Amuro came from Okinawa and was originally an idol in the Toshiba-EMI system, initially part of a group called Super Monkeys. Her January 1995 solo debut "Try Me *Watashi o Shinjite* [I Believe]" caught Komuro's eye. The song featured the same sort of Eurobeat that Komuro works with. He had Amuro's contract moved from Toshiba-EMI to Avex Trax and quickly started recording singles. Her first two singles on Avex Trax became big hits, selling over two million copies all together.⁷⁰

An album of her singles called *Dance Tracks Vol. 1* was issued in early 1996 and sold two million copies. By this time, her popularity grew wildly. Young women all across Japan, called "Amura," began to copy Amuro's style, wearing their hair long and tinting it blonde, wearing miniskirts and shirts to bare their midriff as well as high platform shoes. Amuro's second album, *Sweet 19 Blues* with all original

⁶⁹ Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 99, 103.

⁷⁰ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 88; Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 100.

Amuro's second album, *Sweet 19 Blues* with all original material, was put out in July 1996 and sold over four million copies. In August, she played Chiba Marine Stadium, backed by Sheila E., a drummer who was part of Prince's group, and became the first teenage female to play a stadium show in Japan. Her popularity was so great that even her backing group, Max, was spun off and had hits of their own.⁷¹

But it was not just Amuro that was popular in 1996; all of Komuro's productions continued to sell well. In the spring of 1996, Komuro productions occupied the top 5 positions on the singles chart:

1. "Don't Wanna Cry"- Amuro Namie (Avex)
2. "I'm Proud"- Kahala Tomomi (Orumok)
3. "FREEDOM"- globe (Avex)
4. "Love and Peace Forever"- trf (Avex)
5. "Baby baby baby"- dos (Orumok).⁷²

The last group, dos [sic], which stands for "dance of sound," was originally going to be a showcase for another second tier idol, Nishino Taeko. However, Komuro recruited, rehearsed and named the group as part of a segment for the weekly music show "Asayan" on TV Tokyo.⁷³

While Komuro's popularity has cooled a little in the last few years, and legions of Amura don't patrol Shinjuku and Shibuya anymore, he is still very much active. In December of 1996, Komuro signed a deal with the Australian-based News Corp, owned by Rupert Murdoch, who controls the

⁷¹ McClure, "Seiko and Sukiyaki" 37; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 88; Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 100.

⁷² McClure, *Nippon Pop* 91.

⁷³ Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 103.

based News Corp, owned by Rupert Murdoch, who controls the Fox Network and its related companies. Beginning in February 1997, Komuro began looking for new talent to develop and produce in Taiwan, Hong Kong and elsewhere in the Asian region. Eventually, Komuro also set up a satellite channel beamed from the Hong Kong headquarters to the rest of Asia and eventually to the United States.⁷⁴

The popularity of Komuro had two effects, both related and overlapping. The first was the increased visibility producers in Japan. The other was the popularity of all forms of dance and synthesizer based music. The clubs in big cities, especially those in Roppongi, Shinjuku and Shibuya in Tokyo, have become places where all sorts of musical styles are developed and a following built. Some styles, like techno, reggae and rap, went mainstream in a fashion, while others, like acid jazz and jungle stayed strictly within the clubs and the specialty record shops. DJs drove the club scene and could be divided into two groups, those that produced and remixed and those who just spun records.⁷⁵

The dance music scene of the 1990s was highly international in nature, though mainly centered in Europe. As a result, some Japanese DJs and producers have issued records outside of Japan. For example, DJ Krush is signed with the UK's Mo' Wax label, the premier trip hop⁷⁶ label. Ken Ishii, one of the more popular Japanese techno artists, first recorded for the Belgian label R&S before signing with

⁷⁴ Schilling *Encyclopedia* 103-04.

⁷⁵ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 128.

⁷⁶ Trip hop is a style of music that uses synthesizers and many layered samples but has a slow tempo.

first recorded for the Belgian label R&S before signing with Sony in 1995. However, the Japanese DJ that has had the most success so far is Towa Tei.⁷⁷

Towa Tei, a Japanese of Korean descent, first received international attention as part of the group Deee-Lite. In the late 1980s, Tei was working as a DJ for the hip-hop group Afrika and The Jungle Boys in New York before hooking up with American Lady Miss Kier Kirby and Russian-born Super DJ Dmitry. Towa Tei adopted the name Jungle DJ Towa Towa and Deee-Lite put out their first album in 1990, *World Clique* on the American label Elektra. The big hit from the album both in the US and in Europe was "Groove Is In The Heart." The song was number one for three weeks in late 1990 on both the club play and 12-inch single *Billboard* chart and peaked at number four for three weeks on the Top 100 singles chart. The album peaked at number twenty, and both the single and the album sold over 500,000 copies in the United States, earning them a gold certification. "Groove Is In The Heart" became the most successful song since "Sukiyaki" associated with a Japanese artist. Even a decade later, "Groove Is In The Heart" remains one of the favorite songs of many club goers.⁷⁸

Deee-Lite combined dance grooves and fashions from the 1960s and 1970s with late 1980s club sounds, reflecting the ethos of New York City clubs like Pyramid and Afrochine. Members of the funk band Funkadelic perform on the album and

⁷⁷ Oliver Wang, "Japanese DJs" *EST* 262; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 110.

⁷⁸ *ASIA ELECTRONICA: Mae, Tei, Singh for Our Ears* n.d.
<http://www.netmanor.com/polvo/music1.html> [15 Aug 1999]; Larry Flick
 "New On The Charts," *Billboard* 28 July 1990: 24

Members of the funk band Funkadelic perform on the album and the rapper Q-Tip from the rap group A Tribe Called Quest makes a guest appearance on "Groove Is In The Heart." The lyrics reflect the playful pastiche of samples, such as the use of a fragment of the *Bewitched* theme song in "E.S.P.", funk and disco instrumentation, and a very heavy dance beat. The lyrics are upbeat and have a positive message, promoting the idea of a "global village" and a "world clique." There is also a lot of word play like in "What Is Love?"- "How do you say.../degorgeous?/ dewith it?/ degroovy?/ define?"- or "Groove Is In The Heart"- "the depth/ of hula groove/ move us to the nth hoop/ we're goin' thru to/ horten hears a who." This sort of lyrical and musical juxtapositioning would become a trademark of Towa Tei and other similar artists.⁷⁹

As dance music became more popular in Japan, Towa Tei began to split his time between Japan and New York. In 1991, he co-produced Ryûichi Sakamoto's album *Heartbeat*. In 1992 and 1993, he did a series of high profile remixes for Japanese artists like Yellow Magic Orchestra, Pizzicato Five and Sandii as well as working on a second Deee-Lite album, *Infinity Within*. In 1994, Towa Tei officially left Deee-Lite and released his first solo album, *Future Listening*. On this album, as well as his other projects, Towa Tei doesn't see himself as a traditional musician but more of a facilitator. In the same fashion as Komuro, Towa Tei works mainly with a sampler and a computer, writing and putting together songs. However, unlike Komuro, Tei then draws from a wide range of

⁷⁹ Deee-Lite, *World Clique* Elektra, 60957-2, 1990; ASIA ELECTRONICA; Flick 24; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 131.

However, unlike Komuro, Tei then draws from a wide range of musicians, rather than a set group, to complete his songs. Thus, he has Nomiya Maki, singer for Pizzicato Five, singing on "La Dolce Vita" from *Future Listening* or Kylie Minogue and Harumi Hosono paired on "German Bold Italic" from the 1997 album *Sound Museum*.⁸⁰ This allows Tei the freedom to write songs and then find the proper musicians to complete them rather than being forced to write songs around the limitations of a fixed group.

In addition to his production and solo work, Towa Tei occasionally will release projects under different names. For example, while *Sound Museum* was intended to be a commercial project, Tei released a more experimental album at the same time under the name Sweet Robots Against The Machine. The self-titled project was intended to be more hip hop in flavor, a style Towa Tei feels he identifies with just as much as house music. "Hello Baby" from *Sweet Robots Against The Machine* features big heavy beats and lots of sampled voices, a good example of the remainder of the album—in some ways similar to his work with Deee-lite, but without the 1960s and 1970s instrumentation.⁸¹

Several other artists worked in a thriving techno scene in Japan. Artists like Ken Ishii and Denki Groove, along with others releasing albums and 12-inch singles on indie labels played a wide range of styles; with examples varying from random beeps and loops from old Moog synthesizers to heavily layered works using a wide selection of samples.

⁸⁰ ASIA ELECTRONICA; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 131.

⁸¹ *Sushi 4004 Bungalow*, bung 036, 1998; ASIA ELECTRONICA.

heavily layered works using a wide selection of samples. Some are like Ken Ishii, who was attracted to techno initially because of its do-it-yourself nature and the ability to create his own sounds.⁸²

Then there are outfits like Denki Groove. Made up of Takkyu Ishino (who often goes by TackQ Ishino), Pierre Taki and Yoshinori Sunahara, the band first got attention by doing a remix of a TM Network song, "Rhythm Red Beat Black" in 1991. They recorded their first album *Flash Papa* in England for Sony that year. Unlike some techno artists, they built a following by doing a series of live performances in Japan, and starting in the late 1990s, touring Europe. In addition to their work as Denki Groove, all of the members have also released solo albums and done remix and production work for other artists.⁸³

Towa Tei, however, is not the only Japanese artist heavily influenced by hip hop and rap. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a rap movement began to emerge in Japan. Starting in the mid-1980s, *Krush Groove* and other rap movies began to appear in Japan. Inspired by these movies, and to a lesser degree by acts like the Plastics, a small group of fans began to build a hip hop underground in Japan and emulated the music, fashion and culture of primarily the New York rap scene. Early rap records, which began appearing on indie labels, such as File, around 1990, tended to have a pretty heavy social message, covering subjects from the Hiroshima bombings to the environment. This reflected the

⁸² McClure, *Nippon Pop* 110.

⁸³ "ENGLISH" *Denki Groove Official Home Page* 1999
<http://www.sme.co.jp/Music/Info/denki/english/index.html> [20 Aug 1999].

Hiroshima bombings to the environment. This reflected the more socially conscious side of late 1980s rap by New York based outfits like Boogie Down Productions and Public Enemy. The most successful of these early groups was Scha-dara-parr. The group's early success was based on their skill at alternating between songs with a message and those made of nonsensical strings of popular words. Even when the group moved to a larger label, they kept the same sort of mixture in their music. The group's 1995 release *5thWHEEL2TheCOACH* on Eastworld, an affiliate of Toshiba-EMI, mixes lighter songs about summer with songs full of bragging about rapping ability.⁸⁴

Rap broke into the Japanese mainstream in 1994 when East End x Yuri's song "Da. Yo. Ne." became a hit. Originally put out as an EP by File, with backing from Epic, part of the Sony group, the song initially sold 300,000 copies, an unheard of amount for a Japanese rap album, when a good selling album used to be around 20,000 copies. The reason for the popularity of the song was its subject and style. Ichii Yuri, formerly part of an idol ensemble, and East End, a two-man rap group, talk about everyday problems like boy-girl relationships. "Da. Yo. Ne." which could be translated as meaning "so be it" in Tokyo dialect, eventually sold over a million copies. *Denimed Soul*, the album that soon followed, became a big seller.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Niechela R. Dwekman of "HappewarncbedospNutsng NbnasenseWé' NewJapankeTimes NewYork1992esl00aJand.1992;1Wang,e262;AMcMucéurnNipNopp00;9Scha-dara-parr *5thWHEEL2theCOACH* Eastworld/Toshiba-EMI (Japan), TOCT-8865, 1995.

became a big seller.⁸⁵

The success of "Da. Yo. Ne." with its heavy use of Tokyo dialect inspired a curious reaction. Initially, a group of Osakans, calling themselves West End x Yuki, released a version called "So. Ya. Na." which has the same meaning as "Da. Yo. Ne." in Osaka dialect. The song used the same basic sample and even pretty much the same lyrics and style, but in the Osaka dialect. The success of that song, especially in the Kansai region, the area around Osaka, prompted Epic to put together other similar projects for other parts of the country, ranging from Hokkaido ("Da. Be. Sa" by North End x Ayumi) to Fukuoka ("So. Ta. I." by South End x Yuka).⁸⁶

While this may seem as just marketing, but the various regional versions have the effect of decentering Tokyo as the source of all popular culture. The domination of Tokyo fashions and language has been a constant undercurrent to the creation of Japanese popular culture in the 20th century. By issuing regional versions of the same song, similar to the release of Osakan and Okinawan pop, Epic/Sony simultaneously reaffirms its power to release music nationwide from Tokyo, but also allows an avenue for other regions to speak in their dialect. The release of the song have the further effect of showing that a wide range of popular music styles, including rap, have spread throughout Japan and is not simply centered in the main urban areas of Tokyo and Osaka.

East End x Yuri had other hits, like "Maicca" [Oh Well]

⁸⁵ Nicholas D. Kristof, "Rappers' Credo: No Sex Please! We're Japanese," *New York Times* 29 Jan. 1996, local ed.: A4; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 95.

⁸⁶ East End x Yuri "Ii Kanji Ya Na Kanji [Feelin' Good Feelin' Bad]/ Da. Yo. Ne. Local Version Omnibus" Epic (Japan), QACB 90006, 1995.

East End x Yuri had other hits, like "Maicca" [Oh Well] and "*Ii Kanji Ya Na Kanji* [Feelin' Good Feelin' Bad]." Their success let other rap groups finally onto the major labels. Scha-dara-parr and Geisha Girls got major recording contracts. Geisha Girls, who scored big with "Grandma Is Still Alive," are actually two men dressed up in geisha outfits and were co-produced by Towa Tei. Both groups tend to use a lot of humor and contemporary slang in their raps, making them very understandable to youth.⁸⁷

But while humorous rap songs were the bigger sellers, rap more in the style of West Coast gangster also moved to the big labels. DJ Honda, who works in this style, released his debut solo record in 1995 on Sony. Honda is considered one of the top Japanese hip hop DJs and works with many American rappers, like Gangstarr, Biz Markie, and the Beat Nuts. It was this association that led the United States release of his debut to peak at 90 on the US charts, the first Japanese hip hop artist to do so.⁸⁸

Rap, however, is not the only club sound to get some mainstream attention. Japanese reggae artists also made an impact in the mid 1990s, though not as great as rap. While some Japanese artists have used famous reggae producers to work with them, such as Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare working with Sandii & The Sunsets and Sayoko, most of the Japanese reggae scene was confined to clubs, where DJs spin records and Japanese reggae bands play to crowds. For most Japanese, the political nature of reggae is not important.

⁸⁷ Kristof A4; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 96.

⁸⁸ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 99.

Japanese, the political nature of reggae is not important. Rather, it is viewed as simply feel good summer music. Sadao Osada, a DJ at a reggae night club in Tokyo said, "The crowd here at Mix is happiest when I'm playing dance-hall-type records [a style that emphasizes the dance elements of reggae, with little in the way of politics]." ⁸⁹

As a result, most of the reggae that has made it into the Japanese pop mainstream tends to use elements of the style, such as reggae's distinctive instrumentation and bass line, but lyrically it remains on safe topics. Sayoko's remake of "*Ue O Muite Arukô*" is a good example, which was released as a single in 1995. This song, along with song it is paired with, "*Yume no Tabihito* [Traveler Of Dreams]," are clearly reggae influenced, both in the singing and the arrangement. However, lyrically, the two songs are love songs, and is comparable to some of the reggae informed pop hits of the mid-1990s in English. ⁹⁰

But as in the case of rap, there are a handful of Japanese reggae artists that try to create music more in keeping with reggae's themes. Artists like Chikeo Beauty, PJ, Audio Active, and TSPO draw heavily from ska and reggae influences and work with Jamaican artists. Though some complain there is not yet any original Japanese reggae, just imitations and emulations, its very presence highlights how Japan's interconnectedness with the rest of the world in the 1990s has led to a expansion in the number of international

⁸⁹ Steve McClure, "Japanese Reggae Heads For Mainstream" *Billboard* 2 Oct 1993: 101.

⁹⁰ Sayoko "*Ue O Muite Arukô/ Yume no Tabihito*" New Pulse/Cutting Edge/Toshiba-EMI (Japan), CTDN-84000, 1995.

1990s has led to a expansion in the number of international popular music styles are being performed in Japan. Reggae provides tangible proof that Japan has a wider range of inspirations to draw from, in part because of its positionality in the global system.⁹¹

Another musical scene that is tied up with both Japan's globalization and its club scene is acid jazz. Acid jazz started in England, and it is a combination of jazz fusion from the 1960s and 1970s and hip hop. Groups like United Future Organization (UFO), Major Force and DJ Krush in the mid 1990s became popular in the clubs of both Japan and Europe playing this sort of music. While its popularity on a broader scale was limited, it was important because it was one of the first scenes to have a high degree of crossover between Japanese and foreign artists. In part, this is because of the attitude of the musicians. Matura Toshio of the group UFO stated, "We are unconscious of our nationality. When we play or record, we don't think, 'Oh, this is going to be a hit in this country or that country.'" ⁹²

This sort of attitude can be explained by the make up of some of these groups. UFO, for example, is made up of three members, Yabe Tadashi, Matura Toshio and Raphael Sebbag, a French DJ based in Tokyo. After working together as a production company and DJing at clubs for years, in 1991, they decided to make their own records. In early 1992, the group had a hit in the UK clubs "I Love My Baby (My Baby

⁹¹ George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Politics of Place* (London: Verso 1994) 16-17; McClure, "Japanese Reggae" 101.

⁹² Steve McClure, "Japan's Cool Cats" *Billboard* 12 June 1993: J-11, J-12.

group had a hit in the UK clubs "I Love My Baby (My Baby Loves Jazz)." From the start, the band released albums both in Japan and internationally. Many of the other acid jazz artists, most notably DJ Krush, actively work in both Japan and overseas, mostly in England.⁹³

Club-centered genres such as acid jazz, rap and reggae, as well as Shibuya-kei and punk discussed below, have led to the formation of subcultures around the music similar to the rave scene in England. Reggae and rap are especially strong in this regard. A certain style of speaking and dressing has been long associated with both styles of music. Serious rap fans in Japan, for example, have often followed trends in fashions of American rap and hip hop culture. Those deeply in the reggae scene will often wear their hair in dreadlocks and the red, yellow and green of Rastafarianism. The common thread between these two scene is that the "true" source of the music, the location with the most authentic production of the style and music, is placed outside of Japan; in the case of rap, it is America and for reggae, Jamaica.

While the people in these scenes maybe earnestly emulate the style, both musically and in lifestyle, there is a feeling of imitation about this. The ideal is to perfectly reproduce the "authentic" original, though through the process of what Lipsitz terms "creative misunderstanding," new variations that are more suited for the local situation, are created, such as the use of Japanese slang and dialects in rap and adapting the form to communicate ideas of a more

⁹³ McClure, "Japan's Cool Cats" J-12; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 130.

immediate concern, as in the case of "Da. Yo. Ne."⁹⁴ This same process of creatively "misunderstanding" was also in evidence back in the 1950s with rockabilly and country music; taking a style of music and simultaneously projecting a set of ideals that is suppose to represent, in this case America, and adapting the music to more closely fit the local situation. Contrast this with the attitude of acid jazz, which is seen as a music literally of nowhere- rather than expressing the ideal of a place, it expresses the ideal of being placeless.

As Thornton has noted, however, even if the music and fashions are globally marketed, the crowds are local and define themselves against the local mainstream.⁹⁵ People continue to identify and define themselves around the scene, despite having elements of the music moving into the mainstream. It is as if they refused to be folded into the mainstream, which in 1990s Japan became increasingly difficult to limit to a single musical style. Certain styles such as reggae, punk and noise remained at the fringes of popular music, but other styles such as acid jazz, rap and heavy metal, which began on the fringes, moved more firmly towards the center, while retaining the notion of a "subculture." Part of the reason that acid jazz, rap, heavy metal and, to a certain extent, reggae could move into the mainstream is because they could be readily adapted to fit into popular music conventions without losing their defining characteristics. Punk and noise, on the other hand, do not

⁹⁴ Lipsitz 160-61.

⁹⁵ Thornton 98-99.

characteristics. Punk and noise, on the other hand, do not have that luxury. The very purpose of noise is to be anti-musical. With punk, the politics and the attitude of the performers define the style as much as the performance. To separate either style for its basic philosophy transforms into something else.

One common misconception concerning the musical subcultures in Japan is since they did not originate in Japan, they are simply imitative. Leo Ching writes how Japanese punk is just "a 'style', losing all political implications."⁹⁶ Others have made similar comments concerning Japanese rock, rap and reggae. First of all, this is simply reiterating an old theme that has reoccurred since the Meiji Era in Western commentary that the Japanese are just imitative and not creative. Secondly, it denies the negotiations of individuals with respect to new musical styles and the creative interpretations that Japanese artists have made of those styles. Ching's argument relies on the notion that when cultural artifacts and practices are transported from one context to another, they are rendered meaningless because their meaning is dependent on their original surroundings. Brannen, on the hand, argues that these cultural artifacts, when transported to a new context, are recontextualized and given a new set of meanings, such as in her example of Tokyo Disneyland.⁹⁷

However, in the case of Japanese punk (or rap or reggae), it is not quite that simple. Just as the

⁹⁶ Leo Ching "Imaginings In The Empires Of The Sun: Japanese Mass Culture In Asia" *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture* 183.

⁹⁷ Brannen 218-19.

reggae), it is not quite that simple. Just as the differences in economic and social opportunities between America, England and Japan have produced different nuances within punk culture, certain common threads remain. Some of the attitudes and practices associated with punk, such as rebellion, alienation and the do-it-yourself ethos, remain constant no matter what their context, but there has also been adaptations for the Japanese scene as well. The rebellion aspect in Japanese punk is less overt than in American or British punk; rarely does one find explicit political commentaries within Japanese punk lyrics and shocking appearances are done more for theatrics. Shonen Knife, for example, do not wear their hair close cropped or have multiple piercings, as would be considered more common among American punks, but in the Japanese context they are considered punk rockers. Jun Skywalker(s), another punk band that was swept up in the band boom, performed in striped t-shirts and bellbottomed pants. Yet, musically, both drew inspiration from punk bands and played a similar role of shaking up the Japanese music scene. Shonen Knife, especially, would include the notions of rebellion and alienation not in overt calls for revolution, but in a more subtle juxtaposition of serious meditations of silly subjects, highlighting their absurdity.

While I will not deny that punk (and other musical scenes, such as the *Bôsôzoku*, discussed in Chapter Three) has a tendency to be highly regulated and uniform in Japan,⁹⁸ Ching's dismissal of Japanese punk does little to answer why

⁹⁸ Ching 183.

Ching's dismissal of Japanese punk does little to answer why people are attracted to the style in the first place. I feel Ching is more concerned about the cultural imperialism that Japan has exerted on Taiwan and the rest of Asia (an issue that has gotten increasingly contentious since the mid 1980s, but one that lays outside the scope of this thesis) rather than a more thorough examination of the nuances of popular music.

As well as transforming electronic dance music from a subcultural style to one that has mainstream appeal, the popularity of Komuro as a producer has allowed other producers to work freely. Some of them are centered around their own record label, such as Nobukazu Takemura's bellisma! records which is part of the Toy's Factory [sic] label. Takemura specializes in a more dance oriented sound.⁹⁹

Others will have artists on several labels. Kobayashi Takeshi produces a number of bands that have a melodic, more guitar based sound, like My Little Lover, Mr. Children and Spitz. Mr. Children, which has released seven albums and numerous singles on Toy's Factory, and Spitz, which has released several albums on Polydor, are in many ways some of the better remainders from the band boom. While these bands attract fans because of their good looks, they also put out tight, well played rock and pop songs. The songs also sell well. Mr. Children's "everybody goes" from December 1994 sold 1.2 million copies as a single. The song's prominent electric guitar and spirited vocals about wanting to get rid of the world is both a good example of Kobayashi's style and

⁹⁹ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 132.

of the world is both a good example of Kobayashi's style and indicative of the diversity of the Japanese pop chart.¹⁰⁰

Other than the dance scene, another particularly producer-driven area of Japanese music is "Shibuya-kei" or The Shibuya Sound. Shibuya is a trendy part of Tokyo where many young people hang out. This section of Tokyo has numerous small clubs and record stores, ranging from tiny used record shops specializing in a particular genre to the enormous seven story Tower Records that opened there in 1995. Initially, many of the artists associated with Shibuya-kei got their start playing in clubs in and around Shibuya. The sound could be best described as eclectic, with a fondness for 1960s and 1970s American and French pop, though many of the Shibuya-kei artists experiment with a wide range of international pop styles. In a way, Shibuya-kei is a further extension of the sound that Deee-Lite first put out, but drawing from an even greater palette of pop music sounds, ranging from 60s French pop to rap and drum n' bass. Shibuya-kei is also notable as the first international pop music movement that is led by Japanese artists.

Shibuya-kei, like many other musical labels, is rather vague and since the artists usually considered part of the Shibuya Sound are so diverse in style, some people wonder if there really is such a thing as a "Shibuya Sound." "Yes there is," answers promotion company staffer Hisae Anya. "It's more sophisticated and stylish than Mr. Children. Shibuya-kei artists like Pizzicato Five, Kahimi Karie, and

¹⁰⁰ Mr. Children, *Bolero*, Toy's Factory (Japan), TFCC-88099, 1997; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 42-43.

Shibuya-kei artists like Pizzicato Five, Kahimi Karie, and Kenji Ozawa care more about their sound than other pop musicians." Epic/Sony A&R staffer Ken Kishii counters, "It's difficult to say, because there's no strict meaning to the term. It's a little different from other Japanese pop music—it's closer to the feeling of British or American pop. It's a flexible, light feeling."¹⁰¹

The foremost purveyor of Shibuya-kei is Pizzicato Five, a group that started when Konishi Yasuharu and Takanami Keitaro met at Aoyama Gakuin in a music club and discovered they shared similar interests in music. The first band Konishi formed while still in high school was a tribute to The Monkees' singer Davy Jones, where everybody played the tambourine. Takanami also had previous musical experience, doing session work with Ryûichi Sakamoto. In 1984, the two decided to form a band with Kamomiya Ryo, who was in the same music club, and Sasaki Mamiko as their vocalist. A friend of theirs brought Hosono Harumi to listen to their demos and in 1985. Hosono agreed to produce the group's first two 12 inch singles, released on Hosono's Non-Standard label.¹⁰²

Pizzicato Five's first two 12 inch singles, "Audrey Hepburn Complex" and "Pizzicato V in Action" released in 1985 and 1986, respectively. showed that they were taking a little different approach to music. Konishi and Takanami show a fondness for 1960s and 1970s American culture, as evidenced by the cover of Harper Bazaar's "The 59th Street Bridge Song

¹⁰¹ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 65.

¹⁰² Mark Wasiel "archive retrieval: history.txt" *Pizzicato Five Mailing List* p5ml-request@bipv02.bi.ehu.es [2 Feb 1999]; Grace Lee, "Pizzicato 5" *EST* 277.

by the cover of Harper Bazaar's "The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feeling Groovy)" and songs with titles like "The Audrey Hepburn Complex" and "Action Painting," a reference to Jackson Pollock. In addition to referring to the past, there was also a sense that they were not taking themselves too seriously, with a song made up of little pieces of other Pizzicato Five compositions called "What's New, Pizzicato?" a play on the movie and song "What's New, Pussycat?" There was also a hint that the band was looking to go international at some point, since all the songs have both English and Japanese titles.¹⁰³

Later on, when asked about his influences, Konishi responded with a long list that gives some idea of the multiple layers that comprise the band: Yellow Magic Orchestra, Bootsey Collins, Juan Garcia Esquivel, 1960s retro-futurism, 1970s soul, *Breakfast At Tiffany's*, Brigitte Bardot, The Pharcyde, The Monkees, Wes Montgomery, Andy Warhol, Mavis Staples, Beastie Boys, Sergio Mendez, Van McCoy, Five Americans, Burt Bacharach, Plastics, Steve Miller, Donovan, and *Bye Bye Birdie*.¹⁰⁴ As the group went along, each of these disparate influences have been shown.

Another element of the group that showed up early on was the tongue in cheek commercialism of the group. Shibuya is a place where you can buy not only the latest music, but also the latest in fashion; several department stores in the area have their regular stores, like Tokyu and Seibu as well as shops aimed at a younger crowd like P'Parco, 109, Tokyu Hands

¹⁰³ Pizzicato V [Pizzicato Five], *Pizzicatomania! Non-Standard/Teichiku* (Japan), TECN-15256, 1987 (1994 reissue).

¹⁰⁴ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 67.

shops aimed at a younger crowd like P'Parco, 109, Tokyu Hands and Loft. In 1985, the group released a promotional flexidisc with a Christmas song, "From Party to Party" through the To-B department stores. In 1986, they did the same thing with P'Parco with a song called "Kiss, Kiss, Bang! Bang!"¹⁰⁵

In late 1986, the group signed with Sony records and in 1987, they released their first full length album, *Couples*. While their 12 inch singles were more dance oriented, *Couples* had more Burt Bacharach style pop feel to it. Again musical references abound, with titles like "Summertime, Summertime" (a Gershwin standard), "My Blue Heaven" (another standard from the 1930s) and "The Apartment" (title of a Billy Wilder film from 1960).¹⁰⁶

After *Couples*, Sasaki Mamiko and Kamomiya Ryo left the group and in April 1988, Tajima Takeo joined the group as vocalist. For the first album and 12 inch singles, Konishi and Takanami mainly did the song writing for the group. However, when Tajima joined, he began to write many of his own lyrics and even some of the music. While Sasaki was a breezy, light singer, Tajima was strongly influenced by soul and R&B and his vocal style reflects this. The three Pizzicato Five albums he worked on show a heavy imprint of his style. It was also during this time that the band did its first Japan wide tour, rather than individual dates in Shibuya and Roppongi clubs.¹⁰⁷

When Tajima formed his own band, Original Love in 1989,

¹⁰⁵ Wasiel.

¹⁰⁶ Pizzicato Five, *Antique 96* Sony (Japan), SRCL 3370, 1995.

¹⁰⁷ Wasiel.

When Tajima formed his own band, Original Love in 1989, Konishi and Takanami went looking for another vocalist. They settled on Nomiya Maki. Nomiya was a former fashion model. In the early and mid 1980s, she was in the group Portable Rock with a friend of Konishi's and released a solo record in 1981 called *Pink no Kokoro* [Pink Dream]. Nomiya had also long dreamt of being a rock and roll star. The first album she bought was KISS's 1975 album *Dressed To Kill*, and she was such a huge fan of the band that she went to KISS concerts wearing makeup like Ace Frehley's. She even bought Ace's guitar and amplifier. Nomiya joined the group in 1990, after Original Love got its own recording contract and Tajima left Pizzicato Five. After releasing a reggae-tinged single with Nomiya on vocals called "Lover's Rock," Pizzicato Five left Sony for Nippon Columbia and their imprint Triad in October 1990.¹⁰⁸

With the new label and a vocalist who fit the vision of Konishi and Takanami, Pizzicato Five transformed again. In 1991, the group embarked on a media blitz. Konishi co-hosted a show on FM Yokohama called "Girl! Girl! Girl!" The group toured Japan three times and released a series of EPs, dubbed "5X5," one a month between May and October of that year, culminating with the full length *This Year's Girl*. Rather than the sarcasm of the Elvis Costello song of the same name, Nomiya became an ever changing fashion plate of 1960s and

1970s clothes, while Konishi and Takanami habitually wore

¹⁰⁸ Johnathan Way, trans. "Pizzicato Five: Charming Their Fans Live" *Jose C.'s Pizzicato Five pages*, 20 Oct. 1997, <http://gaztelan.bi.ehu.es/~josec/P5archive/articles/konishi.Y.txt> [22 Aug 1999]; Andrei Dos Santos Cunha, "more ants! (four)" *ONELIST: Music: Pop: p5ml*, 15 Jan 2000, <http://www.onelist.com/messages/p5ml?archive=4> [23 Jan 2000]; Lee, 277; Wasiel.

Nomiya became an ever changing fashion plate of 1960s and 1970s clothes, while Konishi and Takanami habitually wore black clunky glasses and understated suits. To demonstrate this new attitude, one of the songs included on the *This Year's Model* EP, called "This Year's Girl #1," is an interview with Nomiya where she is asked such things as what is her favorite type of man, her hobbies, favorite type of clothes, and her favorite flowers. While this seems frivolous, idols are typically asked the same sort of questions in interviews. Thus, Nomiya was to be the "idol" of the group, while Takanami and Konishi wrote and produced the music.¹⁰⁹

About this time, the label "Shibuya-kei" was first applied to the music of Pizzicato Five and other similar artists. With the small but loyal following of the group in Japan, Nippon Columbia began to set its sights on marketing Pizzicato Five to an international market. The group never seriously intended to be international, but in June 1992, Pizzicato Five played their first US date, playing at "Psycho Nite," a showcase of Japanese artists as part of the New Music Seminar in New York City. The headliners of the show were Shonen Knife, but Pizzicato Five upstaged them, with their elaborate costume changes and catchy music. In 1993, the band returned to "Psycho Nite," and there Terri MacMillan and Tom Toeda of Medius Entertainment decided to represent the band in the United States.¹¹⁰

Meanwhile, the popularity of the group in Japan

¹⁰⁹ Pizzicato Five *Made In USA* Matador, OLE 099-2, 1994; Wasiel.

¹¹⁰ Steve McClure, "Japanese Pop Music in the US" *Mangajin* 36 (June 1994): 15; Lee, 277; Way.

Meanwhile, the popularity of the group in Japan continued to grow. On April 7th, 1993, Pizzicato Five released their most popular single, "Sweet Soul Revue." Used as an image song for a spring cosmetics campaign, the popularity of the song solidified the image of the band as being highly fashionable. The popularity of the single also emphasizes the role that having a song in a television commercial in making it a hit. In addition, it also highlights how after the band boom, not only were idols using the commercials for promotion, but musicians of all types. After the release of *Bossa Nova 2001* and several remix albums later that year, the band seemed ready for international exposure. Of interest, the English group Saint Etienne, who play a similar mixture of breezy 1960s pop and dance music did a remix for the group on one of the remix albums, *Expo 2001*.¹¹¹

In 1994, Pizzicato Five signed with Matador Records for the United States and Europe. In June of that year, they released their first international record, *Made in USA*. The title is a double reference; as a reference to a Jean-Luc Goddard film, one of Konishi's favorite directors, and an ironic commentary on the contents of the album, since it consists of songs previously released in Japan.¹¹² What was unusual about *Made in USA* for a Japanese artist was that, with the two exceptions "Magic Carpet Ride" and "Baby Love Child," all the songs were in their original Japanese.

¹¹¹ Pizzicato Five *Expo 2001*, Nippon Columbia (Japan), COCA-11243, 1993; Pizzicato Five "Sweet Soul Revue" Nippon Columbia (Japan), CODA-159, 1993.

¹¹² Wasiel.

Child," all the songs were in their original Japanese. Previously, when a Japanese artist wanted to break into the international market they either rerecorded their songs in English or wrote new ones using English. The sole exception to this rule was "Sukiyaki." A few groups, like Yellow Magic Orchestra and The Plastics, did not need to do this since most of their songs were either already in English or had no lyrics. Those songs that were in Japanese were usually not released internationally until much later.

Konishi has stated he records mainly in Japanese because it is essential for the image of the band. Konishi feels that they are mainly singing about "visions of Tokyo" and in order to do that, they must sing in Japanese. Otherwise, some of the feeling will be lost. Furthermore, Konishi does not write songs with the intention of performing them overseas. Rather, he focuses on Japan and if they sell well overseas, that is okay too.¹¹³

However, just before the release of *Made in USA*, and doing promotional dates in New York and Los Angeles, Takanami left the group to pursue a solo career. Now with Konishi mainly doing the songwriting and producing duties and Nomiya singing, the two released a Japanese album *Overdose* in late 1994. In February and March of 1995, they started their first world tour, dubbed the "Magic Carpet Jetset Tour". Playing 14 dates throughout North America and Europe, 12 of the shows were sold out and the group played for over 12,000 people. The band also did numerous promotional radio and magazine interviews to further promote their sound. As a

¹¹³ Way.

magazine interviews to further promote their sound. As a result, *Made in USA* sold over 100,000 copies in the United States, a respectable amount, especially for a group that does not sing in English.¹¹⁴

The song that immediately becomes associated with the group abroad is "Twiggy Twiggy/ Twiggy Twiggy vs. James Bond." A silly little song about a woman posing in front of a mirror, pretending she's Twiggy, the 1960s model, it originally appeared on Nomiya's solo album. The Pizzicato Five version is based around a sample from "Hawaii 5-0" by the Ventures and music seemingly taken right out of a 1960s spy movie, giving an odd juxtaposition to the lyrics. "Twiggy Twiggy" was the first Pizzicato Five song many people overseas heard, and it prompted them to search for similar sorts of music. The German group Le Hammond Inferno, for example, credit the song as their motivation to eventually release several Shibuya-kei artists and compilations in Europe on their record company, Bungalow.¹¹⁵

In 1995, the band released another international compilation *The Sound Of Music*, which eventually also sold over a 100,000 copies in the United States¹¹⁶, while they released a new album in Japan called *Romantique '96*. Sony, seeing the popularity of the group, reissued remastered versions of the group's Sony albums as well as a greatest hits compilation *Antique '96*. In the meantime, Nomiya took a year off to have a baby in 1996 and the group released a

¹¹⁴ Terri MacMillan, "Magic Carpet Jetset Tour Report" *Jose C.'s Pizzicato Five pages* 1995 <http://gaztelan.bi.ehu.es/~josec/tour95.html> [22 Aug 1999]; Wasiel.

¹¹⁵ Le Hammond Inferno, *Sushi 4004* liner notes.

¹¹⁶ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 67.

year off to have a baby in 1996 and the group released a rarities compilation called *Great White Wonder*. This package illustrates several points about the group, both in terms of the contents of the compilation and its often elaborate packaging.

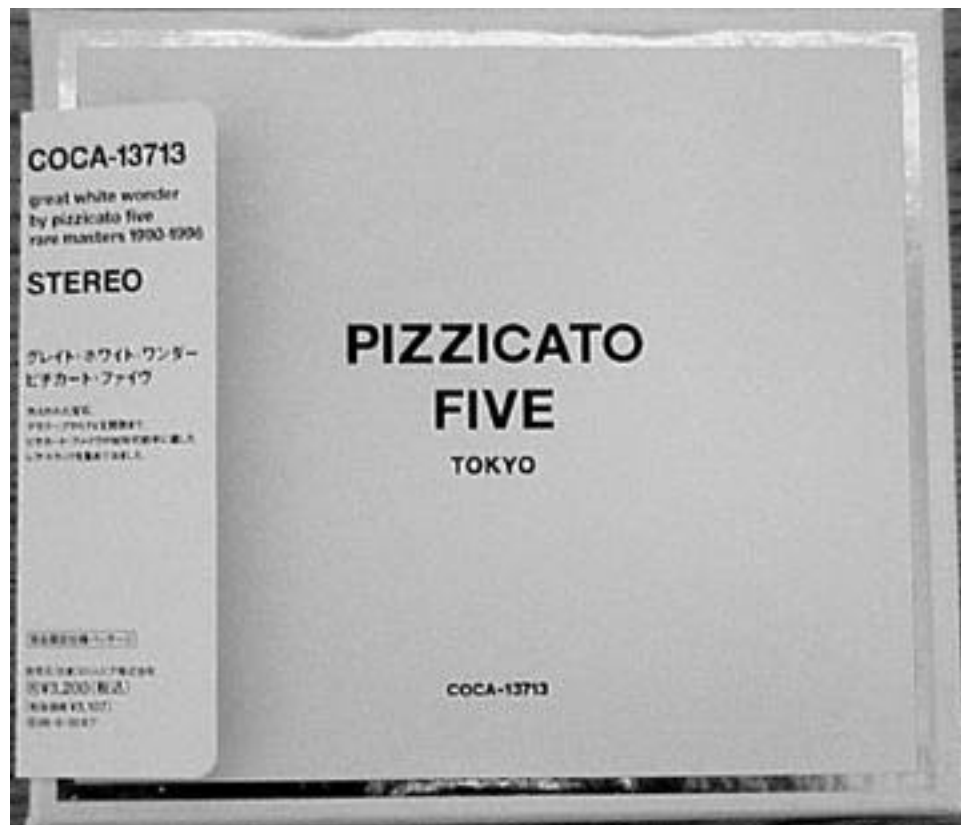


FIGURE 2: *Great White Wonder: Rare Masters 1990-1996* limited edition package.

The title of the compilation, *Great White Wonder*, is from a famous Beatles bootleg from the 1960s, and in the liner notes Konishi states that he hoped that the material that did not make the album would be collected by a fan and put out as a bootleg called *The Black Album*, a reference to

the much bootlegged Prince album of the same title.¹¹⁷



FIGURE 3: The complete *Great White Wonder* package.

As figures 2 and 3 illustrate, the limited edition version of the album came in a box that was meant to resemble a Coco Chanel box with “Pizzicato Five” and “Tokyo” written on it. Coco Chanel is Nomiya’s favorite type of perfume and fits with the band’s fashionable image. Inside is the CD and two small booklets. One of the booklets, the one with the circles on the front, is a flipbook with two short promotional animated pieces. One of the pieces is a parody of the opening for the 1960s American TV show *My Three Sons*.

¹¹⁷ Konishi Yasuharu, *Great White Wonder: Rare Masters 1990-1996* liner notes, Nippon Columbia (Japan), COCA-13713, 1996.

of the opening for the 1960s American TV show *My Three Sons*. The other booklet is a series of promotional images the band has put together during the years covered in the compilation, as illustrated in figure four.



FIGURE 4: The many faces of Nomiya Maki from the *Great White Wonder* booklet.

The contents of the CD are also illustrative. In addition to the usual unreleased songs, demo and live versions and unreleased remixes, including another remix by Saint Etienne, there are a few pieces that both talk about the group's influences and the positionality of the group

the group's influences and the positionality of the group vis-à-vis the rest of Japanese pop. Included on the CD are two theme songs that the group did for TV shows, a kids' program, *Kids' Challenge* and a programing about shopping called *Shopping Queen*. The *Shopping Queen* theme is of further interest since it shows the group's propensity to recycle itself. An instrumental version of the song showed up on the 1995 EP *Sister Freedom Tapes* called "Holger & Marcus." Holger and Marcus are the two people that make up Le Hammond Inferno. Another version of the song showed up on the vinyl version of the EP called "Martin & James." Martin and James are two members of the band Karminsky Experience, another European band that works with Pizzicato Five.¹¹⁸

Also included in the compilation are three jingles the group did for Tokyo FM, heavily based on the song "Go Go Dancer," and a short jingle the group did for NTT's DoCoMo pagers, "Lemon Kiss (Like I Do)." While only 17 seconds long, it is meant to invoke the Peanuts' version of the song, done in the 1960s. Other covers include Manfred Mann's "My Name Is Jack," Burt Bacharach's "What's New, Pussycat?" (sung in English) and the ironic "Me, Japanese Boy." "Me, Japanese Boy" was originally an example of using Japan as an exotic location in Western pop, much like Wanda Jackson's 1957 hit "Fujiyama Mama" or Styx's "Mr. Roboto" from 1983. Japan in those cases serves as a quaint, distant location, or in the case of "Mr. Roboto," a technological threat, more in keeping with the tenor of the times. Konishi's translation of "Me,

¹¹⁸ Ted Mills *Pizzicato Five Discography- Song by Song Index* 6 Aug 1999 <http://www.rain.org/~mills/songbysong.html> [22 Aug 1999]; Pizzicato Five, *Great White Wonder*.

with the tenor of the times. Konishi's translation of "Me, Japanese Boy," however, turns the song in on itself, especially since he has Nomiya sing the lines "Me Japanese boy I love you/ You Japanese girl you love me" in English.¹¹⁹



FIGURE 5: *Happy End Of The World* Japanese limited edition

In 1997, Konishi formally converted Readymade, Inc., his production company, into an imprint part of Nippon Columbia, called ***** records, inc. Tokyo. The first release on the new label was their album *Happy End Of The World*, which

¹¹⁹ Mitsui, "Introduction" 259; Pizzicato Five, *Great White Wonder*.

the new label was their album *Happy End Of The World*, which was also the first full length album to be released intact worldwide by Matador. Once again, the limited edition Japanese packaging was elaborate, this time with an oversized clear, soft plastic case with Pizzicato Five written in Korean on the front, as illustrated in figure five.

The use of Korean on a Japanese album is quite provocative. Koreans have long been problematical to the Japanese. Korea is the closest country to Japan, and there has long been ties dating back to the sixth century where Korea has had a key role in transmitting goods from China into Japan. However, Japan tries hard to differentiate itself from Korea, in part because the two countries share so many similarities. Issues such as the occupation and annexation of Korea between 1895 to 1945 and often uncertain residential status of Japanese of Korean descent further complicates matters.¹²⁰ By using Korean script on "Happy End Of World," Pizzicato Five made a risky move by bringing to the forefront potentially unpleasant topics.

To support of the release of the album, Pizzicato Five once again did a world tour, dubbed the "Great Pizzicato Picnic", touring North America in September of 1997 and playing some European dates in early 1998. The concert they gave is another example of their musical philosophy. The show consisted of a prerecorded music and video show, with their touring guitarist Bravo Komatsu and occasionally Konishi supplementing the prerecorded music with electric guitar and tambourine.

¹²⁰ Brannen 228-29.

guitar and tambourine.

After an introductory piece of music where a voice intones many phrases including "If you enjoy the show, Pizzicato Five merchandise is available in the lobby. We want to make more money," Nomiya Maki entered the stage carried on the shoulders of a stage hand. Over the course of the show, she does a series of elaborate costume changes, as illustrated in figures 6 and 7. The idea of the show was to create a total experience of all things Pizzicato, ranging from blatant self-promotion to exploitation of stereotypes. For example, Nomiya comes back after a German report on the 1995 tour wearing a kimono and then says she'll perform "your favorite song, 'Twiggy Twiggy'".¹²¹



FIGURES 6 & 7: Two of the many costume changes from Pizzicato Five concert at The Showbox, Seattle, WA 7 Sept 1997. Photos by author.

While the US version of *Happy End Of The World* only

¹²¹ Pizzicato Five, concert, Metro, Chicago, IL, 13 Sept 1997.

While the US version of *Happy End Of The World* only sold 45,000 copies,¹²² the band remains one of the top Japanese acts outside of Japan. In Japan, they also are visible in the media, in part because of the splintering of tastes after the band boom and the easing of broadcast restrictions since the late 1980s. Konishi hosts a late night music program called *FACTORY* where two acts can perform two or three songs in full, rather than have several acts perform one truncated song, as was the case with older music programs. They also host a late night weekly radio program on Tokyo FM.

In addition to his work with Pizzicato Five, Konishi has also produced, written for, and remixed a number of artists. The most successful was a song written for the idol duo Puffy called "V. A. C. A. T. I. O. N.," a nod to the Connie Francis song of the early 1960s. He has also worked with other Shibuya-kei artists like Kahimi Karie, Cornelius, Fantastic Plastic Machine, as well as writing and producing music for a proto-idol from the 1960s, Hirota Mieko.

With the relative success of both Pizzicato Five and Shonen Knife, United States and European indies have signed a number of Japanese artists for distribution internationally in the 1990s. Indie labels sign mainly two types of groups, Shibuya-kei/dance acts and punk groups.

As already mentioned, artists like Towa Tei, Ken Ishii, Denki Groove and United Future Organization have had internationally distributed albums. Several other artists, as well as compilations of Japanese music, have been released

¹²² *The International Playboy & Playgirl Record* 1999
<http://www.pcmagic.net/markw/p5pbpg.htm> [24 Aug 1999].

as well as compilations of Japanese music, have been released internationally. Le Hammond Inferno's Bungalow label has released two such compilations, *Sushi 3003* and *Sushi 4004* in both Europe and North America. Artists that are closely associated with Pizzicato Five have also received international record deals like Fantastic Plastic Machine, Cornelius, and Kahimi Karie.

Fantastic Plastic Machine is mainly one person, Tanaka Tomoyuki. Tanaka started out in a DJ duo called Sound Possible, doing nightclub gigs and remixes in the Kyoto area. After releasing an album as Fantastic Plastic Machine on an indie label, which was music for a Tokyo based avant-garde dance group called City Boys, a song of his, "Flyin' High" appeared on the Pizzicato Five album *Romantique 96*. He has since released two albums on Konishi's ***** records; both have been released in United States on Emperor Norton and in Europe on Bungalow. Fantastic Plastic Machine has gained some notoriety by having the song "Bachelor Pad" used in the 1999 film, *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*.¹²³ In a way, the demeanor of the Austin Powers films, being a pastiche of 1960s fashions and 1990s attitude is very much in keeping with Fantastic Plastic Machine and Shibuya-kei in general.

Tanaka works in a similar way to Konishi Yasuharu. Tanaka has amassed an enormous collection of over 8000 vinyl records, covering a wide range of styles and eras. These records serve as the basis for inspiration for his own works,

¹²³ Matt Galloway, "Fantastic Plastic Machine's vinyl craving" *NOW on*, May 13-19, 1999 [http:// www.nowtoronto.com/issues/18/37/Ent/music.html](http://www.nowtoronto.com/issues/18/37/Ent/music.html) [01 Feb 2000]; Fantastic Plastic Machine *The Fantastic Plastic Machine*

records serve as the basis for inspiration for his own works, and like Towa Tei, he doesn't play any instruments himself, but rather sees himself more as a conductor and organizer. The result is music that is a mixture of styles and eras, with many guest vocalists.¹²⁴

The real name of Cornelius is Oyamada Keigo. He formed his first band, Lollypop Sonic, while still in junior high school; that band led to Flipper's Guitar, which he formed with Kenji Ozawa. Flipper's Guitar got swept up in the band boom and they released a few albums on Polystar. The music by Flipper's Guitar was sunny guitar based pop, similar to early 1980s Southern All Stars. The band, however, did not last too long, and split up in 1991.¹²⁵

After the band's breakup, Oyamada started to do some production work. His big break came when he produced Pizzicato Five's album *Bossa Nova 2001* at the age of 24. Not long after, he took the name of Cornelius, from his favorite movie, *Planet Of The Apes*. His first solo record, *The First Question Award* in 1994, was musically similar to his work in Flipper's Guitar. His next two albums, however, 1995s *69/96* (along with the associated remix album *96/69*) and 1997s *Fantasma*, combined guitar based pop with songs heavily laced with samples and electronically altered sounds. It was also during this time that he formed his own record label, Trattoria and continued to produce other artists, like Kahimi Karie. *Fantasma* was released by Matador internationally in 1998.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ ~~Cornelius~~ *Fantasma*, Matador, OLE 300-2, 1998; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 70.

¹²⁵ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 70.

1998.¹²⁶

Kahimi Karie has also had two of her albums released in the United States on the Minty Fresh label and had songs produced by Cornelius and Pizzicato Five. However, she works most closely with the English artist Momus. While close associations between Japanese and international artists are not new (for example, Sadist Mika Band's association with Roxy Music and that of Shonen Knife with Redd Kross and Nirvana), the repeated crossing-over between Shibuya-kei and Western artists, mainly European, is new. English artists like Momus and Saint Etienne, German artists like Le Hammond Inferno and The Karminsky Experience, French artists like Dimitri from Paris and Dutch artists like Arling & Cameron regularly work with Shibuya-kei bands and producers, both on their own albums and the albums of the Japanese artists. On Dimitri from Paris's album *Sacrebleu*, he uses Japanese voices and vocals on some songs and has a remix by a Shibuya-kei remixer, Takimi Kenji.¹²⁷

Arling & Cameron's album *All In* even better illustrates this new crossover. From the cover, seen in figure 8, to the music inside, the Japanese music scene has made a definite impression. The duo, who have also appeared on Pizzicato Five and Fantastic Plastic Machine albums, uses Japanese, English, French and German vocals over bossa nova and lounge influenced samples and beats. In tone, the album is very similar to Fantastic Plastic Machine's album *Luxury*, which also uses a mixture of different language vocals and

¹²⁶ Cornelius *Fantasma*, Matador, OLE 300-2, 1998; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 70.

¹²⁷ Dimitri From Paris *Sacrebleu* Atlantic, 83081-2, 1998.

also uses a mixture of different language vocals and feelings.¹²⁸ There is a definite affinity between the European and Japanese artists because both have common musical backgrounds and experiences. Shibuya-kei draws from American and European pop as well as Japanese popular music. By having similar bases to work from, facilitated by the increased circulation of popular music styles, it becomes easier for musicians to cross borders.



FIGURE 8: *All In* by Arling & Cameron
image ©1999 Emperor Norton

However, Shibuya-kei artists are not the only ones that are getting both international record deals and working closely with a number of international recording artists. A number of punk and punk influenced bands, following on the heels of Shonen Knife, have also received international

¹²⁸ Arling & Cameron *All In* Emperor Norton, EMN 7017-2, 1999.

heels of Shonen Knife, have also received international attention. Some bands like the all-girl punk group from Hokkaido, Supersnazz, which released *Superstupid!* in 1993 on Sub Pop, and Hi-Standard, which released *Growing Up* in 1996 on Fat Wreck Chords, have only released one or two albums on American independents.¹²⁹ However, the groups Cibo Matto and Buffalo Daughter have done a little more.

Cibo Matto, which is Italian for "crazy for food," was started in 1993. Hatori Miho and Honda Yuka, who both attended the same high school in Tokyo, met in New York's East Village. On impulse, the two went to an improv night; Hatori doing stream of consciousness vocals while Honda played on a synthesizer. By 1995, they had fleshed out their sound with guitars and released a 7" single and a self titled album on an indie before signing with Warner Brothers and released *Viva! La Woman*. *Viva! La Woman* has a definite reoccurring theme of food, with titles like "Beef Jerky," "Know Your Chicken," and "Apple." This led some early reviewers to dismiss them as a Shonen Knife knockoff. However, with their 1999 release, *Stereotype A*, the band has toned down the food references and have a more hip hop/punk influenced sound, similar to Luscious Jackson. The band also took part in a side project called Butter 08, which released an album called *Butter* in 1996 on the Beastie Boys' label Grand Royal. Some of the other artists that took part in the project were members of Jon Spenser Blues Explosion, Mike Mills of R.E.M. and Sean Lennon.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Lee and Yang 263.

¹²⁹ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 124.

Mills of R.E.M. and Sean Lennon.¹³⁰

The group Buffalo Daughter started out as half of the band Havana Exotica. When Havana Exotica broke up, guitarist and singer Sugar Yoshinaga and Ôno Yumiko, who handles bass and keyboards, decided to form their own band. In 1993, they recruited DJ Moog Yamamoto and cut a demo. They were soon signed to a Japanese indie label, Bloody Dolphin. After releasing a couple of albums on Bloody Dolphin, they signed with Grand Royal in 1996 and toured the United States. They have since released two albums internationally, 1996's *Captain Vapour Athletes* and 1998's *New Rock*. Musically, they are similar to many Shibuya-kei artists, especially since they have produced Shibuya-kei artist Takako Minekawa and DJ Moog appeared on Cornelius' *Fantasma* album. Cornelius has returned the favor by remixing one of their songs. However, Buffalo Daughter is more guitar based and influenced more by 1970s rock and 1980s hip hop.¹³¹

On the very extreme of music are the noise groups. The goal of these groups is to push the very limit of what is music— full of dissonances, loud squealing noises and grinding noises. While most noise groups were based in German industrialism, there are a number of Japanese practitioners. One of the most prolific is Akita Masami, aka Merzbow.

Merzbow got his start in 1981 releasing numerous albums on Japanese indies, sometimes on a monthly basis. His albums began to appear in Europe on German noise labels in the late

¹³⁰ Lee and Yang 263.

¹³¹ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 82; Lee and Yang 263.

began to appear in Europe on German noise labels in the late 1980s. In 1994, the United States indie Extreme started to release his works. What is most notable about Merzbow's works is they are consistently mastered at an extremely high level so as to emphasize the noise.¹³²

Slightly more musical is the Osaka-based Boredoms. Their lead singer Eye Yamamoto describes their music as "acid punk." They are most known for their wild stage shows. Eye Yamamoto's first band, The Hanatarashi, gained notoriety after one performance where they used a backhoe to chase audience members around until it smashed into a wall. Boredoms' shows are equally bizarre, with the members wearing anything from football helmets to bondage gear. The music itself is of an arbitrary length, anywhere from ten seconds to thirty minutes, consisting of screamed lyrics over feedback. After releasing a few albums in Japan, they managed to sign with Reprise in 1993, mainly on the strength of a following by Sonic Youth. The group appeared on the 1994 Lollapalooza tour and released four albums on Reprise. Because their first album, *Pop Tarti* only sold about 3000 copies in the US and subsequent albums didn't do much better, the band is now being released by the indie label Birdman, though Warner Brothers continues to release them in Japan.¹³³

Bands like The Boredoms and Merzbow can exist within the Japanese music system partially because of more opportunities to hear and to be heard due to the compact disc and rise of

¹³² Jason Ankeny "Masami Akita" *CDNow:Discography* n.d.
<http://www.cdnw.com/cgi-bin/mserver/RP/CDN/FIND/discography.html/ArtistID=Merzbow/select=biography> [26 Aug 1999]

¹³³ Todd Inoue, Eric Nakamura and Jeff Yang, "Japanese Noise Bands" *EST* 267; McClure, "Beginner's Guide" 48.

to hear and to be heard due to the compact disc and rise of Japanese indie labels and in part because the groups have an affinity for the philosophy behind the music. Noise and industrial groups are often based on the cyberpunk concern of overindustrialization and mechanization of the human experience. These concerns are then given musical form by emphasizing bondage, pain, and mechanical sounds. These themes can be seen in other places in Japanese popular culture, most notably in the movies *Tetsuo II: Body Hammer* and *Akira*.

While all these bands, from Pizzicato Five to Merzbow, can exist and flourish in the Japanese music market of the 1990s— and they have all received international attention—they do not represent the mainstream of Japanese popular music. A few bands, like Pizzicato Five, would be considered just outside of the mainstream, yet big enough for record stores to have promotions for them. However, the mainstream of Japanese pop is dominated by guitar based pop and rock, by bands ranging from Mr. Children and Spitz to X Japan, Glay and Luna Sea, soul and R&B influenced pop by artists like Southern All Stars, Original Love and Fumiya Fujii, and dancable pop like the music of Komuro. In the 1990s, a new breed of idol has also emerged, driven by both a new definition of idoldom caused by the Band Boom and the expanding of idols from being just produced by production companies to producer driven idols.

X Japan, which changed its name from X to avoid confusion with the Los Angeles punk band and Australian band of the same name, originally started out as a metal band,

of the same name, originally started out as a metal band, similar to Loudness. The band's early influences were Mötley Crüe and Van Halen, however more recent releases have more power ballads and pop friendly songs. What really set the band apart was its visual appeal. The group performs in full kabuki makeup and wear black leather, in some respects not that dissimilar to KISS at their height in the 1970s. Fans of the group are easily recognizable, since they wear gothic and quasi-bondage gear as part of their outfits.¹³⁴ The style of music that X Japan and other similar bands play has been dubbed visual rock.

The band has proven popular partially because of the drummer Yoshiki's *bishonen*, or androgynous good looks. Yoshiki's popularity was further bolstered after he released a solo album of orchestra songs called *Eternal Melody*, produced by legendary Beatles producer, George Martin. Their 1991 debut, *Vanishing Vision* sold 800,000 copies in Japan, and their 1996 followup, *Dahlia* and subsequent releases have steadily sold more.¹³⁵

Other groups have also become popular playing a similar sort of guitar oriented rock and pop. For example, the group Luna Sea has the same sort of gothic image as X Japan, but are more pop sounding. The group was originally formed in 1986 and the current lineup finalized in 1989, before signing to a major label in 1991.¹³⁶ Glay has also exploited territory

¹³⁴ Gan and Yang, *EST* 264; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 122.

¹³⁵ Gan and Yang, *EST* 264; McClure, *Nippon Pop* 122.

¹³⁶ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 123.

to similar X Japan and has sold over 12 million albums.¹³⁷ Even some production companies have begun to specialize in guitar dominated groups. The production house Being marketed several rock acts such as B'z, Zard and The Wands. Even though Being lost some of its influence it held in the early 1990s, B'z continued to be fairly popular.¹³⁸

Being was one of the several production companies formed in the early 1980s. When the band boom came, Being, along with the newer production houses, such as Amuse and Burning, were able to add more bands, such as B'z, to their rosters. The older houses, like Watanabe Productions, tended to stick with creating solo artists and on getting them on television. As a result, the older houses started to lose their influence. With the band boom forcing many of the music shows that these companies relied on off the air and a greater emphasis on musical talent being shown by the Japanese consumer, a change in the practices of producing idols was called for. No longer could an idol be merely cute and be successful. Those that still want to become a potential idols were no longer settling for just a fixed salary, but an increasing number now received a direct percentage of their royalties as part of their contract.¹³⁹

The most successful of this new type of production agency has been Johnny's and Associates. Run by Japanese-American Johnny Kitagawa since the early 1980s, his agency

¹³⁷ Tim Lister "From cotton candy to acid rebels, Japan's pop scene heats up" *CNN Worldbeat* 15 June 1999
<http://www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Music/9906/15/japan.pop.wb/index.html> [2 July 1999]

¹³⁸ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 127.

¹³⁹ McClure, "Music Star" 76.

American Johnny Kitagawa since the early 1980s, his agency has been dubbed as the "Pretty Man Factory," since all of his groups, including Shonentai, Hikaru Genji, Tokio and Kinki Kids and SMAP, feature young men with androgynous good looks. What sets Johnny's and Associates apart is its emphasis on selling these groups as both singers and television and movie stars.¹⁴⁰

Kitagawa originally came to Japan in the 1950s with the US Army and has split his time between Tokyo and Los Angeles ever since. He has said his philosophy for producing acts came from watching an Alice Cooper concert— every act needs a gimmick. Thus, one of his early popular acts, Hikaru Genji would do rollerskating routines when on stage. The group was put together when Kitagawa asked a group of young men under his tutelage during a dance practice if they would be interested in performing on roller skates. The seven guys that volunteered became Hikaru Genji. The gimmick eventually paid off as their combination of boyish energy and rollerskates, paired with occasionally ragged singing garnered the group eight straight number ones in the late 1980s, including the top three spots in 1988, a feat that had not been accomplished since Pink Lady did it in 1977.¹⁴¹

Kitagawa has said, "I'm not very interested in records," and his marketing of his groups reflects that. Shonentai waited a full seven years after their debut before they released their first single. SMAP, which stands for Sports Music Assemble People, debuted in 1988, but did not release

¹⁴⁰ McClure, *Nippon Pop* 7-8; Schilling *Encyclopedia* 232-33.

¹⁴¹ McClure, "Music Star" 76,80; Schilling, *Encyclopedia* 233.

Music Assemble People, debuted in 1988, but did not release their first single until 1990. However, these groups have not been totally idle in between their debut and the release of their first single. SMAP started out as six backup singers for Hikaru Genji that would perform skateboard tricks. After their debut, Kitagawa had the members of the group, both individually and collectively, show up in numerous commercials, television shows and movies until the group became some of the most recognizable faces in the media. While their September 1990 debut single "Can't Stop!! Loving" reached number two, it was clear that their popularity was well established. They were able to sell out three shows at the Budokan in Tokyo on New Year's 1991. Between 1992 and 1994 they sold out five shows on New Year's and in 1995 sold out six shows, setting a house record for attracting 60,000 fans in one day.¹⁴²

While Kitagawa saw SMAP more as actors and pitchmen than singers, their singles were selling quite well. For example, their September 1994 single "*Gambarimashô*" sold over 910,000 copies and in 1995, "*Oretachi ni Ashita wa Aru* [We Have Tomorrow]" broke the one million sales mark. Their music has also taken definite cues from the popularity of Komuro. SMAP's songs alternate between pop ballads with more dance influenced uptempo songs. The enormous sales figures can be attributed to the change in the fan base. Rather than just young teenaged girls, an increasing number of women in their 30s and 40s are also fans of the group, perhaps because they are a bit of a throwback to the idols of the 1970s and

¹⁴² McClure, "Music Star" 80; Schilling *Encyclopedia* 234-36.

are a bit of a throwback to the idols of the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁴³

One of the reasons for Kitagawa's idol group's success is his savvy use of tie-ups. SMAP, for example, was nearly impossible to avoid on television for most the 1990s, due to their numerous appearance in advertisements, often with a SMAP song playing in the background. Tie-ups had a profound impact on how music was marketed, not just with the idol singers. Cosmetic companies began to plan their campaigns around which song they chose for an image song, and that song usually became a hit. Other types of industries began to forge close alliances with popular music. Starting in the late 1970s, beverage and car companies began to use popular music in their advertisements and in turn, sponsoring concerts for the artists, a practice known as "crowned" concerts. "Crowning" refers to the practice of placing the name of the sponsoring brand or product before the name of the artist, as in "Pepsi presents Madonna" or "Midori presents Pizzicato Five".¹⁴⁴

While having a song become a theme for a popular show or movie had been around since the 1960s in Japan, the importance of having such a song increased in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. Part of the reason for the change is the types of shows that now included a theme song. Not only dramatic shows, but also morning wide shows (morning variety shows that feature gossip and light patter), game shows and comedies all began to feature pop music themes, often done by

¹⁴³ Schilling *Encyclopedia* 236-7.

¹⁴⁴ Kimura 317.

comedies all began to feature pop music themes, often done by idols singers. In the 1980s, this list grew to include anime shows.

For most of the 1980s, either voice actors or idols singers would sing the theme song. Sometimes the song would be specific to the show, but most often it was a more generic song, relating to general themes of the show, such as adventure, romance or action. If a series lasted longer than six months, the opening and closing themes for the series would often change, usually to coincide with different phases in the story line.

It is also interesting to note that several prominent anime series feature becoming an idol and singing as part of the story line. For example, a major subplot in *Macross* is the love interest of the main character becoming a famous idol upon the spaceship/city. In *Bubblegum Crisis* and *Bubblegum Crash*, the four women who fight clandestine cyborgs in their spare time perform in a group called Priss and The Replicants, a name taken from characters in the movie *Blade Runner*. *Sailor Moon Stars* featured major characters in an idol group called the Three Lights. The fictitious group's music was made available on singles and soundtrack albums. There was also singles featuring songs and poetry for the other major characters in the series.

As compact discs became more common, soundtracks for animated shows and video games also became increasingly common. A single movie could generate numerous soundtracks. For example, the 1984 movie *Nausicaä Of The Valley Of The Wind* has a movie soundtrack, two additional albums with

Wind has a movie soundtrack, two additional albums with different arrangements of the soundtrack music, an "image" album, which features music that was written initially to inspire the animators and some of which eventually showed up in the final soundtrack, and a "drama" album, which is basically the entire movie in audio form.¹⁴⁵

As the popularity of these soundtracks increased, with fans of popular shows eagerly buying up any item associated with the show, including the multitude of soundtracks, singles and image albums, the importance of them as a means of promotion, both for the show and for singers, also increased. In late 1980s, the idol group CoCo did two songs for the series *Ranma 1/2*.¹⁴⁶ Later in 1992 and 1995, the group of voice actors (known in Japan and overseas fan circles as *seiyû*) for *Ranma 1/2* released two albums of music as their respective characters as DoCo, both as a parody of the idol group and a pun on the Japanese word *doko*, or "where." By the 1990s, even singers and groups that were not in the idol system or *seiyû* had songs included as part of animated series. The visual rock group Boøwy did the ending theme for the kid's anime *Detective Conan*. Top selling acts Judy & Mary, TM Revolution, and The Yellow Monkey all contributed music to the series *Rurounin Kenshin*, partially because both the series and the artists were released by Sony. The Osaka based guitar duo Gontiti did the music for the series *Bono*

¹⁴⁵ Joe Hisashi, *Kaze no Tani no Naushika* [Nausicaä Of The Valley Of The Wind] *Original Soundtrack* Studio Ghibli/Tokuma Communications (Japan), TKCA-70133, 1993.

¹⁴⁶ *Ranma 1/2 TV Theme Song Complete* Ever Anime International (Taiwan), A8-969, 1999. It should be noted that Taiwanese and Hong Kong editions of anime soundtracks have also become common (though usually in bootleg form), demonstrating how popular anime is in these regions.

based guitar duo Gontiti did the music for the series *Bono Bono*.¹⁴⁷

But in the 1990s, it was not just animated shows that saw a broadening in the range of acts doing theme songs. All types of shows used a broader range of acts to perform a signature song. Normally staid NHK, for example, had Pizzicato Five perform the theme song for its *Kids' Challenge*. The music shows also changed in character. While shows showcasing idol and *enka* singers still remained, they were much less common and their importance greatly diminished. In their place were shows like *FACTORY* or *Music Fair* where two or three artists are featured in an hour, allowing them to perform three or four songs each, rather than the one truncated song of the older type of shows. Because of this change, artists no longer objected to appearing on television, like the New Music artists did, because the longer format allowed more creative freedom. As a result, a wider range of artists appeared on television.

While radio and television have changed the way songs are marketed, because of greater access to education and exposure to global things, musical tastes have also changed. In the mid-1990s, an international study of tastes of high school students from US, Hong Kong and Japan was conducted. Similar to the survey conducted in 1968 referred to in Chapter Three, the mid-1990s survey polled 2000 students from two high schools in Tokyo, where the parents were relatively well educated and well off financially. However, since it was an international study, based on a similar survey given

¹⁴⁷ Gontiti, *Vacances Epic* (Japan) ESCB 1513, 1994.

was an international study, based on a similar survey given in the United States, nation specific popular music genres, such as J-Pop were not included in the survey. As the survey's authors, Wells and Tokinoya note, Japanese tend not to subdivide J-pop into genres (except in a few rare instances, such as Shibuya-kei), but rather identify with specific artists or sets of artists. Western performers, on the other hand, tend to be grouped by genre. Despite these limitations, the difference in the results from the 1968 survey are striking.¹⁴⁸

The participants in the survey were asked to rate eleven different musical genres on a scale of one to five, five meaning the respondent liked it very much. By far, the most popular genre was rock, with 44.8% giving it either a four or five rating, followed by rap (26.5%), Top 40 (26.1%), classical (23.4%), jazz (22.7%), and techno (21.8%).¹⁴⁹ It should be noted that percentages for classical and jazz had not changed that much from the 1968 survey (25.7% and 16.3% respectively),¹⁵⁰ but the strength of rock and genres that have been created since the 1968 survey, like rap and techno, indicates a fundamental change in the tastes of Japanese youth. As Wells and Tokinoya point out, the results of the Japanese survey, with the exception of classical and jazz, are compatible with the American survey.¹⁵¹

On the one hand, this result would be consistent with

¹⁴⁸ Alan Wells and Hiroshi Tokinoya "The Genre Preference of Western Popular Music by Japanese Adolescents" *Popular Music and Society* 22.1 (1998): 44.

¹⁴⁹ Wells and Tokinoya 45-46.

¹⁵⁰ Komota, et al. 63.

¹⁵¹ Wells and Tokinoya 46.

On the one hand, this result would be consistent with the fears of cultural critics that the tastes of urban dwellers around the world is synchronizing. Japan's general affluence caused by its positionality within the circulation of transnational capital and information has led to a flattening of musical preferences.¹⁵² However, within that vague category termed "international pop music style" a wide and diverse range of music is encompassed. As noted above, Japan specific categories were not included in the survey. The survey does not emphasize the fact that within Japan, Japanese artists practicing these music styles are the most important, both in terms of influence and in overall sales. While much of Japanese popular music can be broadly categorized as rock or pop (or what ever genre), nuances like the importance of the use of Japanese language within the music, bands that incorporate elements of Japanese folk musics (as discussed in Chapter Three) and the creation of institutions, such as idols, that more readily appeal to Japanese values have the contradictory effects of making the music more exportable across international borders and localizing it to Japan.

The survey also included questions on how the students spent their leisure time. The most popular activity was watching television, listed by 55.2% of the respondents. The second most common response was listening to recorded music, listed by 31.8 percent. Only 6.1% said that they listened to the radio.¹⁵³ Despite efforts by the New Musicians and others

¹⁵² Neilson, *World Society* 45. ¹⁵³ *World Society* 71-72.

the radio.¹⁵³ Despite efforts by the New Musicians and others since the 1970s, these results emphasize how important having a song on television is. In fact, the bond between television and popular music in Japan has gotten stronger since the 1970s.

Japanese popular music is a moving target to try to keep up with. In 1999, a new crop of female idols have become popular, many in the mold of Amuro. Utada Hikaru and Suzuki Ami are typical of the new crop, blending soul and dance music to the pop sounds. Utada Hikaru, only sixteen years old and born in New York, managed to sell over five million copies of her album *First Love*. She is part of another trend. Utada is not just an idol, she also writes her own songs. Thus idols are no longer just meant to look good on television. as they were for most of the 1970s and 1980s, but the quality and the nature of the music being produced is also important.¹⁵⁴

Like the other eras discussed in this thesis, the years 1985 to 2000 saw a great deal of change. The biggest change was the move from a one way movement of musical influence to a more two way movement. Instead of musical styles being generated outside of Japan and then being imported in to be adopted and emulated by Japanese artists, Japanese artists began to make their influence felt on wider level. Pizzicato Five and Towa Tei helped create Shibuya-kei and it is performed by both Japanese and European artists. EZO, Shonen Knife, Merzbow and Cibo Matto became internationally

¹⁵³ Wells and Tokinoya 45.

¹⁵⁴ Lister.

Knife, Merzbow and Cibo Matto became internationally recognized for their own distinctive take on their particular genres. While no Japanese act has yet to approach the overall international success of "Sukiyaki," in the 1990s, Japanese acts from Dreams Come True to Pizzicato Five have become available outside of Japan in unprecedented numbers.

Yet, despite all of these changes, certain things remain characteristic about Japanese popular music. While the institutions of television and idols has undergone changes because of shifts in popular tastes and expectations, they still exist. Getting a song on television is still the way to promote a song. Idols still have a heavy visual component to them, but they can come from anywhere- a production house, a producer, a group off of the street- and they can take a wide range of forms. While compact discs, large international chain stores and general affluence have made access to music from anywhere even easier, Japanese artists still are the top sellers within Japan, a marked contrast to the situation in Europe. This is what makes Japanese popular music so interesting to listen to and study. But, what does the future hold?

CHAPTER V

FUTURE LISTENING

Modern (usually Western) popular music has gained a strong foothold in Japan. Jazz, rock, and the blues are enjoyed by the younger generation, along with half-Westernized or half-Japanized folk and popular songs. Many basically Japanese songs are sung to the accompaniment of Western musical instruments; at the same time, many basically Western subjects are treated in Japanese-style drama or song.

-Encyclopædia Britannica¹

The above quote says little about the diversity and strength of the Japanese popular music scene and much about its perception overseas. The quote reiterates the often-heard comment that Japanese music is simply imitative, or worse, uncreative. The use of the phrases "half-Westernized" and "half-Japanized" would suggest that Western musical idioms are not completely integrated into Japanese music, as if it is an uneasy amalgamation. Furthermore, it suggests that the bulk of popular music is coming from outside Japan. None of these things have been even partially true since the 1960s. This thesis has demonstrated that a wide range of Western musical idioms have been successfully adapted and internalized by Japanese artists to make music that is able to express Japanese ideas and concerns, no matter what the genre.

From the early practitioners of country, swing and

¹ "Japan" *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. 1999
<http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?eu=109542&sctn=8> [30 January 2000].

From the early practitioners of country, swing and rockabilly to the latest electronic dance acts, Japanese popular music has adapted a wide range of styles that might be surprising to some, especially to people who wish to view Japanese society and culture as static and unchanging. However, throughout the 20th century, especially in the postwar period, Japanese society has struggled with the challenges and problems of becoming like the West while retaining its own identity; Japanese society tried to create an environment that was simultaneously Western and not Western, Asian and not Asian. This process, which has been reflected so well in popular music, has not always been smooth and easy, such as the reactions to rockabilly and Group Sounds in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, because of this change, themes of loss and nostalgia have gained popularity at different times and taken different forms. Yet, both in popular music and in society, once these changes have been done, they can not be undone.

Personally, I find the state of Japanese popular music fascinating. It illustrates vividly that the process of coming into contact with music and making it your own is nearly universal and that a wide range of styles of music that some people think of as being purely local or regional can have universal appeal and meaning. Granted, you will not find many players of Celtic music or South African pop in Japan, but it is surprising the number of styles you do find. I think this has to do as much with the position that Japan has achieved as a major node of the global economy, especially centers like Tokyo and Osaka, where information

especially centers like Tokyo and Osaka, where information and goods from all over comes to be bought and sold, as it does to the universal themes and ideas that the music expresses. In turn, I find it a bit ironic that there is often surprise expressed by Japanese artists, not just musicians but also those involved in other creative endeavors, when they learn their work has achieved a degree of popularity outside of Japan. Konishi Yasuharu might insist that his songs are about living in Tokyo, but the urban themes that Konishi writes about can have an international appeal. In the late 20th century, city life world wide has to a certain degree common elements that can be readily recognized, whether it is in Tokyo or in Seattle.

The future for Japanese popular music is hard to predict. For the foreseeable future, idols in Japan will continue, though their nature has now greatly changed. No longer content with just looking good, record companies and producers will look for idols that can write music and play instruments. The role of the producer has now irrevocably changed, from nameless record company employees to a person whose name and sound will sell a new artist.

The great question is can Japanese popular music make an impact on the rest of international popular music, perhaps not to the degree of American or British pop, but perhaps of continental Europe? It certainly has the potential to do so now, with the large number of interactions between Japanese and foreign artists performing in a wide range of styles. Foreign, primarily European and some East Asian artists are seeking out Japanese producers and artists to work with and

seeking out Japanese producers and artists to work with and vice versa. Advertisers and people putting together movie soundtracks are discovering Japanese artists' music and including it. Yet, attempts by big name Japanese acts like Dreams Come True and Seiko Matsuda to try to break into the American market met with failure and most of the acts that are considered a "success" overseas, especially in Europe and America, do so on a very modest scale. In places like Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, the situation is a little different, especially in Taiwan and Hong Kong, where Japanese artists regularly sell well. But it could also be argued that those places tend to also have a similar approach to how music is marketed, so there is not as big of a leap as there would be in other parts of the world.

William Gibson, in his novel *Idoru*, tells the story of a girl from Seattle traveling to Tokyo to meet with the head of the international fan club for a Taiwanese band over the marriage of one singer to a Japanese virtual idol.² Despite the fact that Japanese popular music, in any form, is strangely absent in the novel, the sort of world he describes, where popular music is not just regional but global is simultaneously a bit daunting and strangely plausible. In that sort of world, Japanese artists would have an equal footing with artists elsewhere in the world. Slowly, this is starting to happen now, with an increasing number of Japanese artists becoming available from domestic record labels. The internet has also increased access to a wide range of Japanese groups, through informational pages in

² William Gibson *Idoru* (New York: Berkley 1996).

wide range of Japanese groups, through informational pages in both English and Japanese and web sites selling Japanese releases, many of which have proved invaluable for this thesis. Today, it is possible for someone with an interest in Japanese popular music to get timely information and releases, no matter where they are because of the internet.

At the same time, if Gibson's world comes to pass, there seems to be a bit of a flattening and homogeneity to the music. Some critics argue that has already come to pass, with international pop music styles replacing regional flavor. While there is certainly a frightening similarity between SMAP and Backstreet Boys, or any of the "boy bands" that appeared in American pop music in the late 1990s, there still remains a bit of regional flare and quirks to much of popular music. For example, SMAP portrays themselves as good-natured boys next door, much as been common with the promotion of idols since the 1970s, while the Backstreet Boys, by their manner of dress and musical style, try to appear as if they are street-wise hipsters. The former appeals to the Japanese desire for averageness (despite the other changes that have occurred in the music scene) while the latter attempts to convey to American audiences a sense of credibility. As long as these differences in which qualities are the most important remain, the number of truly global music stars will remain very small.

Perhaps Gibson's view of popular music is a bit simplistic (as are his views of many other things). Perhaps, Japanese popular music can retain its unique character and still go forth in the world. That story, however, has yet to

still go forth in the world. That story, however, has yet to be written.

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